

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro

REVIEWED

NINJA GAIDEN [XB]

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2 [XB/PC]

WINNING ELEVEN 7 INTERNATIONAL [PS2]

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM [GC]

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO [PC]

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT [XB]

FIGHT NIGHT 2004 [PS2/XB]

MOJIB RIBON [PS2]

RETRO

BBC MICRO

Too cool for school



XBOX® 2

The software war begins

PREVIEW

THE MATRIX ONLINE

Even better than the real thing?

PREVIEW

KILLER 7

Capcom's schizophrenic shooter revealed


eMag

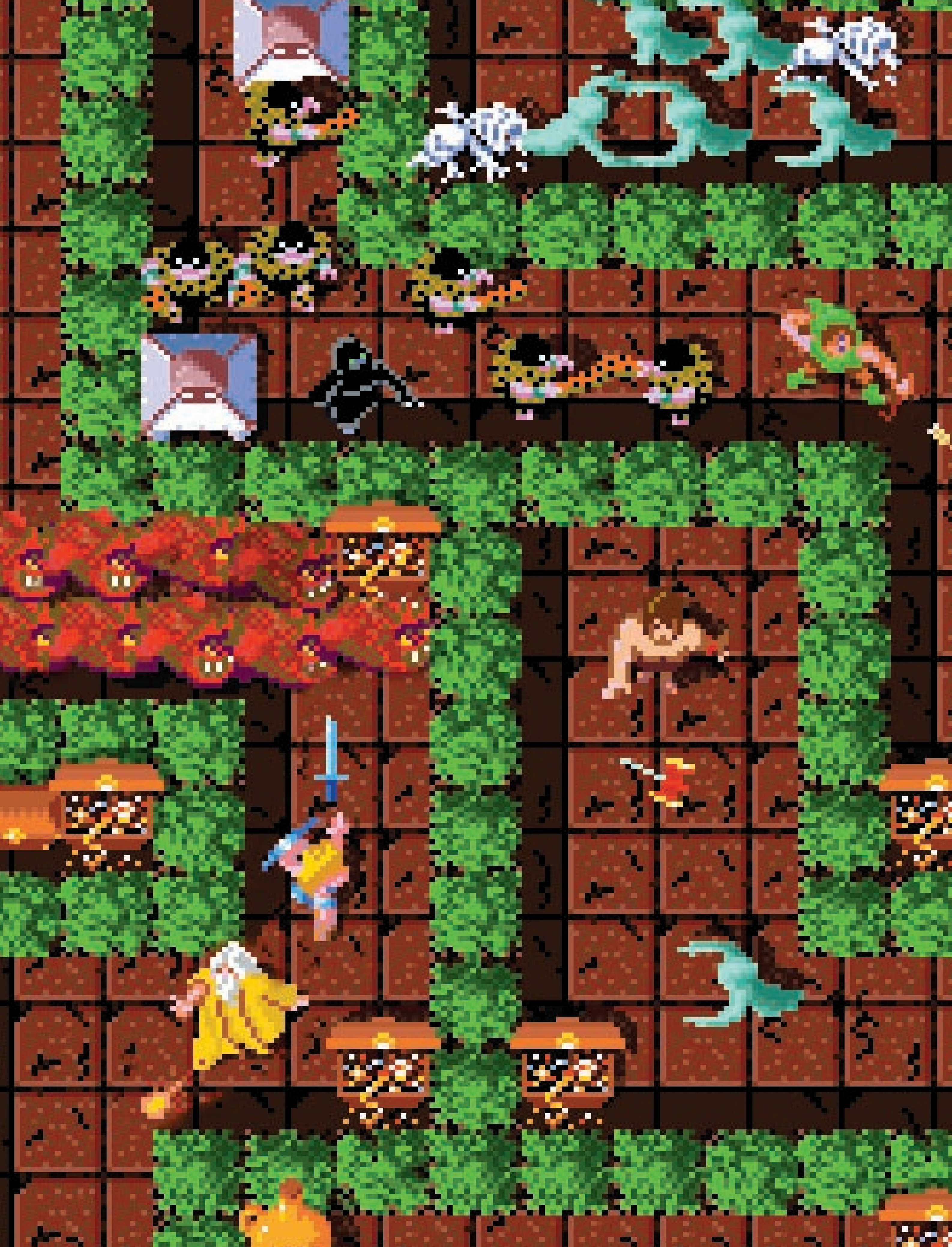
It's four years since Bill Gates unveiled the Xbox at the Game Developers' Conference in San José. Back then few could have predicted that the big black box would become such a dominant force in videogames.

Fast forward to 2004 and once again Microsoft used the platform of the GDC to herald the beginning of the next generation of hardware, but in a much more subtle way. Though many had hoped that Xbox 2 itself would be unveiled, Microsoft, perhaps more interestingly, decided upon a different tactic. "We're Microsoft, not Microhard," said development relations manager Brett Schnepf as he reinforced the fact that the company's primary focus would be on giving developers the tools to create original and innovative games for this and the next generation of hardware. Whether this spells the death of the raft of sequels and 'me-too' games that have littered this generation of hardware remains to be seen.

One thing is certain, however – with a foothold in the console market already established, the battle for console supremacy in the next generation of hardware has now shifted up a gear. Over to you, Sony and Nintendo…

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor







GAMES TM 18

WARRIOR
SCORE HEALTH
11640 1175

VALKYRIE
3x SCORE HEALTH
19300 1339

WIZARD
SCORE HEALTH
12230 1244

ELF
SCORE HEALTH
12360 1263

4 COINS =
1 ISSUE



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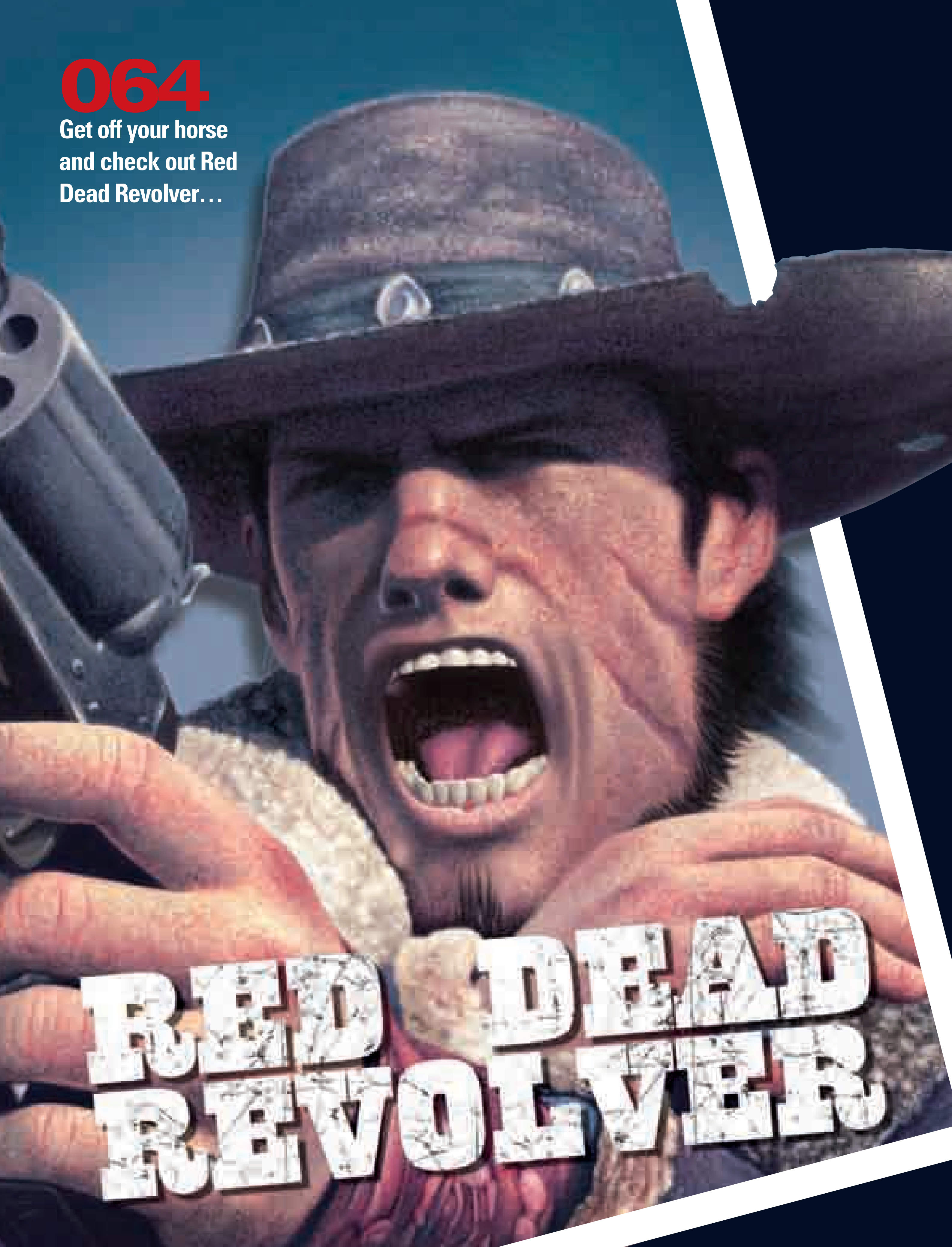
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REVIEWS

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Get off your horse and check out Red Dead Revolver…
RED DEAD REVOLVER

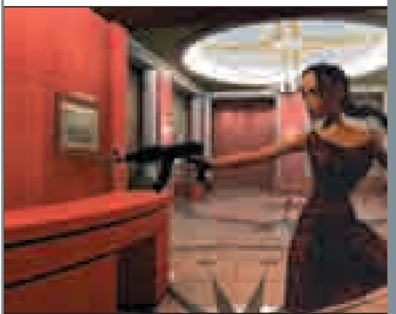


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LARA'S LOOKING GOOD

After the disappointing *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*, Eidos is hoping that Lara's move to Crystal Dynamics will get her back on track. "We're still doing a lot of market research in terms of direction of the content and the character," said Eidos CEO Mike McGarvey. "However, the fundamental technology is already complete and the character is up and running in the environment with new moves and a new control system." We're sceptical about the so-called improvements, but anything will be better than *AOD*.

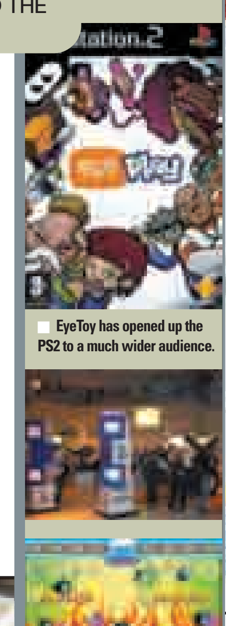






RUBIN DOES A RUNNER

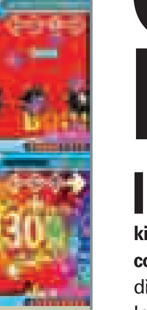
Naughty Dog's studio president Jason Rubin will be moving on to pastures new once *Jak III* is completed. The revelation came at the recent DICE summit, where Rubin criticised publishers who don't give credit to developers. Rubin insisted, however, that his speech was not directed at Naughty Dog's owner, SCEA. "The speech was directed at the industry in general, not one company," he said. "In order to realise the goals I outlined in my talk, I need to expand my reach."



EyeToy has opened up the PS2 to a much wider audience.



Popular franchises will help shift consoles.



Phenomenal PS2 sales bode well for the PS3.



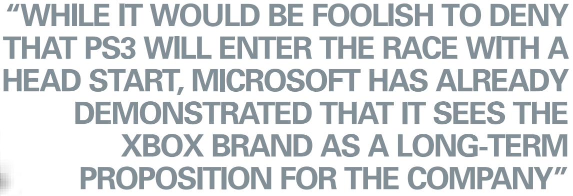
MARKET RESEARCH SUGGESTS SONY'S PLAYSTATION3 HAS ALREADY WON THE NEXT-GEN BATTLE

OVER BEFORE IT'S BEGUN

If there's one thing we tire of easily, it's the inevitable war of statistics and figures that kicks off whenever a new generation of consoles is unveiled. So imagine our disappointment when a survey by the Informa Media Group suggested that Sony has not only won the next-generation console battle, but will completely obliterate its opposition, despite the fact that there isn't even a firm release date for any of the new machines.

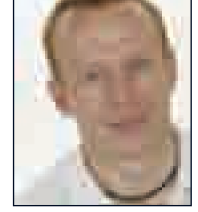
Of course, research like this is inevitable, but when it starts getting posted by the likes of the BBC we can't help but wonder whether this is actually helping the industry in any way. "We decided to report on this as the subject is of interest to our readers," said Alfred Hermida, technology editor of BBC News Online. "Given Sony's track record with the PlayStation2, it seems likely that it will enjoy similar success with its next generation console."

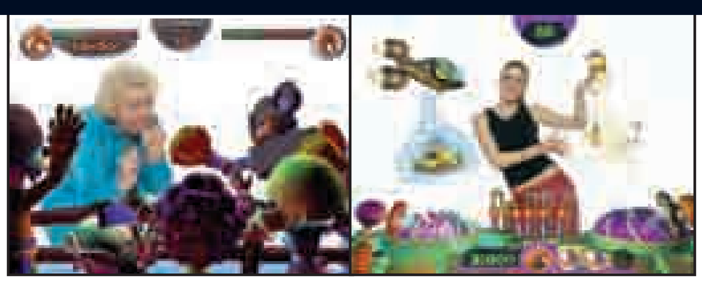
Despite the BBC stating that it's been made obvious that the news is not based on fact, we're not sure if the average consumer will see it the same way. Informa's Toby Scott, the author of the repor, explained the whole story should be treated as nothing more than speculation. "Any work like this is dependent on a set of assumptions, which are given in detail in the report," he said. "I had extensive interviews with all the hardware companies, plus some leading software publishers and developers, and other industry analysts. The end result is as accurate as the assumptions and the model make it; we won't know for sure until 2010." Scott's report reveals that the PS3 is predicted



"WHILE IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO DENY THAT PS3 WILL ENTER THE RACE WITH A HEAD START, MICROSOFT HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THAT IT SEES THE XBOX BRAND AS A LONG-TERM PROPOSITION FOR THE COMPANY"

DOUG BONE, TRADING DIRECTOR, SIMPLYGAMES.COM





PlayStation2 is perhaps the most consumer-friendly console thanks to the family-oriented EyeToy.



Although the market research suggests the PS3 will be streets ahead of other consoles, Xbox 2 could do well too.

to have sold at least 30 million units in Europe by 2010 – a stark contrast to the 10 million Xbox 2s and 5 million N5s that Microsoft and Nintendo repectively are expected to shift.

Interestingly, many developers and publishers were reluctant to comment on Scott's revelations, with most simply stating that they are too busy concentrating on the current generation. But several developers were happy to reveal their own thoughts on the report, with Miles Jacobson of Sports Interactive going so far as to say: "I would suggest that this survey has the same factual basis as the MOD's documentation regarding Iraq before the war."

Scott is adamant, however, that surveys such as this are a crucially important factor for any company that wishes to plan its future. "Given the interest and sales we've had, I don't think the survey is premature at all," he said. "The nature of business information is forecasting sales and technology trends and it's something we and our rivals have been doing for years. None of us do it to make friends in the industry – we do it because our clients want reliable, well-explained data they can then use for business planning."

The fact of the matter is that it's simply way too early to predict what will happen. After all, who would have thought that Atari or Nintendo would ever have been displaced from their seemingly unshakable thrones? "While it would be foolish to deny that PS3 will enter the race with a head start, Microsoft has already demonstrated that it sees the Xbox brand as a long-term proposition for the company," said Doug Bone, trading director for simplygames.com. "Consumers have learned in recent years that Xbox is a fantastic gaming platform, so unlike the present battleground, for Xbox 2 Microsoft will at least be able to enter the arena with a degree of momentum."

Of course, we should never write off Nintendo, and while third-party support for the console continues to dry up, Bone is confident that it will be more than ready for the next generation. "Nintendo is, as ever, the enigma of the piece and, as demonstrated over the last Christmas period (when GameCube overperformed against market expectations), must never be ruled out. Whatever happens, I'm sure it'll be one hell of a scrap."



RENDERWARE STORY

Criterion Software is regarded as one of the most advanced middleware developers in the industry, so it came as no surprise that it used the Game Developers' Conference to show off the next generation of its RenderWare technology. RenderWare4 was one of the biggest talking points of the show, mainly because its focus is on the next generation of consoles. "RenderWare4 has been squarely targeted at what next-generation games will bring: massive data sets, parallelism in architecture and huge calls on visual effects," said Criterion's Adam Billyard. "When Criterion began planning for new hardware two years ago, it was obvious that an iteration of current-generation technology simply wouldn't deliver."

As well as revealing RenderWare4, Criterion also announced a new RenderWare toolchain for the PSP and a collaboration with major silicon manufacturers to produce middleware for mobile phone games. Lincoln Wallen of RenderWare Mobile sees Criterion's involvement as a way to push mobile gaming to even higher levels. "This is a significant part of our strategy to ensure that developers and publishers are able to deliver content efficiently for current and next-generation gaming platforms," he said.

While we're excited to see Criterion and other big companies building the foundations for the future, we just hope they don't forget that there's still plenty of life left in the current generation of consoles and phones.

RENDERWARE GETS EVERYWHERE

With over 500 titles currently supporting Criterion's middleware, there's not enough room to list them all, so here are a few of the more recent examples…

BURNOUT 2
Criterion's excellent racer shows just how far its middleware software has been pushed. We expect *Burnout 3* to look even better.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3
Konami is just one of many Japanese developers to use RenderWare, other notable examples include Hudson and the mighty SEGA.

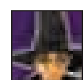
SONIC HEROES
SEGA's mascot may have resurfaced in a rather average title, but RenderWare made it a simple task for him to move over to all three of the major platforms.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
The award-winning *Vice City* is still going strong and has been further revitalised by its move to the Xbox. It's unknown if *San Andreas* will use RenderWare, but it seems pretty likely.

MORTAL KOMBAT 5: DEADLY ALLIANCE
It might be showing its age compared to the likes of *Soul Calibur II* and *Dead Or Alive 3*, but it's still a huge improvement on previous incarnations

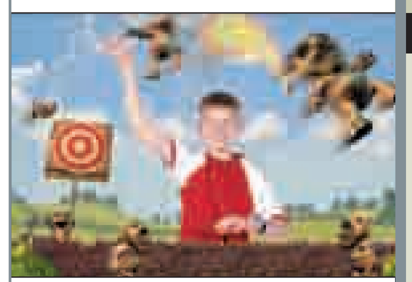
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



EYETOY GOES HARRY POTTY

Electronic Arts has revealed that its next *Harry Potter* title will feature Sony's innovative EyeToy. It would appear that players will be able to wear Hogwarts' sorting hat and take part in all manner of *Harry Potter*-themed mini-games. Although unlikely to appeal to the more mature gamer, it's great to see EA trying something different and we hope to see other developers use the device in a similar way. While *EyeToy: Play* was a massive success, the follow-up, *Groove*, didn't achieve the same status. Let's hope *Eyetoy: Sports* can rectify this.





CODEMASTERS HEADHUNT

Thanks to a record financial year that saw a turnover of £76 million, Codemasters has decided to go on a spending spree and is urging developers to step forward with their unpublished games. "We would be delighted to hear from developers with unsigned titles, or those not satisfied with their current publishing arrangements," said Nick Wheelwright, Codemasters' managing director. The firm is currently signing new titles for all current consoles, as well as Xbox 2 and Sony's PSP and PlayStation3.





Will the DS sell better than the GameCube?

THE STATS

CPU CORE
Main Processor: ARM946E-S (67 MHz)
Cache: 8Kb for instructions, 4Kb for data
TCM: 32Kb for instructions, 16Kb for data
Sub Processor: ARM7TDMI (33 MHz)

MEMORY
Main Memory: 4Mb (8Mb in the debugger)
ARM9/ARM7 Shared: 38Kb (2 x 16Kb)
ARM7 Internal Work RAM: 64Kb
VRAM: 656Kb

LCD
Screen Size: 256 x 192, RGB pixels, two screens
Number of Colours: 262,144 (18-bit colour)

2D GRAPHICS ENGINE (A, B)
Backgrounds: Up to four layers
Objects: Up to 128 sprites

3D GRAPHICS ENGINE
Co-ordinate Conversion Ability: Up to 4 million vertices/second
Polygon Drawing Ability: Up to 120,000 polygons/second
Pixel Drawing Ability: Up to 30 million pixels/second

SOUND
16-channel ADPCM/PCM (up to 8 channels of PSG can be established)
Microphone input

WIRELESS COMMUNICATION
Original protocol based on IEEE802.11

INPUT DEVICE
Touch-panel
Digital pad, A, B, R, L, Start, Select (X and Y are under examination)

POWER CONTROL
Can deal with sleep mode (wake-up is possible at a chosen time interval or by wireless reception), 2D engine, rendering engine, geometry engine and the LCD's power control

NINTENDO REVEALS THE STATS BEHIND ITS NEW MACHINE



A TOUCH OF CLASS

As E3 draws closer, speculation about Nintendo's new handheld is spreading like wildfire. Numerous Japanese developers have announced their support for the machine, and their excited comments about the DS have started to filter back to us. Recent interviews in Japan's popular console magazine *Famitsu* suggest there will be a lot of satisfied customers when the machine is finally unveiled.

"We've been waiting for this," said Sonic Team's Yuji Naka. "We'll definitely want to be releasing something in time for launch." Amusement Vision's Toshihiro Nagoshi also has high hopes for the machine: "This is a machine that will stimulate both the users' and the creators' desire to play," he revealed. "It should allow the birth of a whole host of new ideas and play experiences that haven't existed before."

These claims have been bolstered by the recently released stats, which show grand plans for the machine. The most exciting news is that the DS (the name Nitro having been dismissed by Nintendo) will feature a touch-sensitive panel, complete with PDA-style stylus. This could open up a new playing field for the next generation of handheld consoles, and when you consider that the machine will also feature wireless technology the possibilities are potentially endless. "It [the DS] will introduce a refreshing new experience if it's played by one person alone," Nintendo president Satoru Iwata told the Mainichi Interactive website. "But we're hoping that it will be even more fun when played with multiple people."

Iwata-san also explained how he feels the next generation is progressing. "Creating complicated games with advanced graphics used to be the golden principle that led to success, but it's no longer working," he said. "It's obvious that there's no future to gaming if we continue to run on this principle that wastes time and energy [in development]. Nintendo is called 'conservative' and 'quiet' nowadays, so we hope to show our existence as an innovator to new styles of entertainment."

Whether Iwata-san's claims come true remains to be seen, but with just a few weeks to go until the DS's official unveiling our interest in this revolutionary machine has been properly piqued.

LT STUDIOS REVEALS ITS BRAND NEW GRAPHICS ENGINE

MYRIAD MARVEL

As the ideas behind games becomes ever more complex, so too do the graphics engines that are needed to power them. The latest engine from LTStudios, entitled Myriad, features hundreds of characters that all move independently and is already looking very advanced. Although the current demos only show people moving through a congested street, the statistics are nevertheless impressive and bode well for future games.

The rolling demo has 500 lit, skinned and fogged people exploring the busy environment and currently runs at a solid 60 frames per second. The figures follow 500 different AI decision paths and feature totally separate animations. LTStudios, a subsidiary of Argonaut, has stated that these people can be replaced with anything from animals to vehicles, so the possibilities this creates for future games built with the engine are very interesting. "In Myriad we have created a highly adaptable engine and toolset which, as far as we know, can handle higher volumes of moving characters than any other engine that's currently available," said Andrew Parsons, MD of LTStudios. "We're already using many of the features of Myriad in the prototypes that we have under development."

It's already been revealed that Myriad is being used for a new racing game prototype, and providing it steers clear of any *State Of Emergency*-type affairs, the engine could have a bright future.



Ooh, they look just like ants. Nice ants, mind.

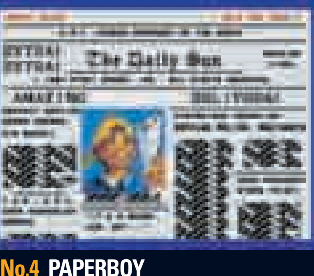


games™ THE TOP FIVE

CRAP JOBS, BUT GOOD GAMES

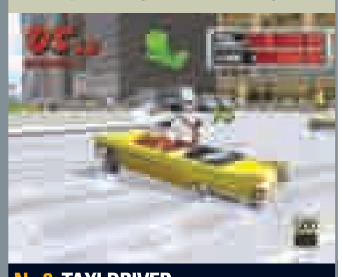
No.5 FARMER

Hey, it worked for *Harvest Moon*…



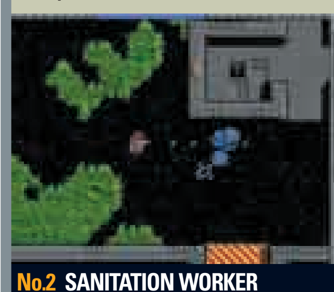
No.4 PAPERBOY

As easy as riding a bike? Yeah, right



No.3 TAXI DRIVER

Are you talkin' to me?



No.2 SANITATION WORKER

A dirty job, but someone's got to do it



No.1 FOOTBALL MANAGER

Hardest job in the world, apparently



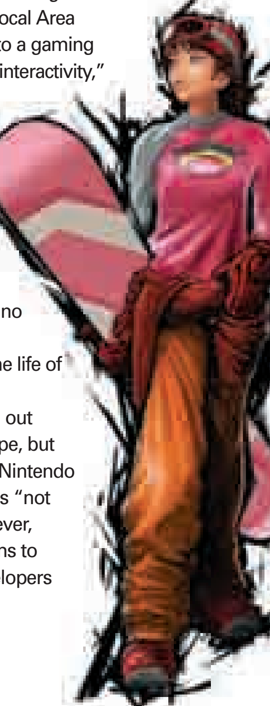
THE LATEST VERSION OF WARP PIPE IS UP AND RUNNING

AT WARP SPEED

While Nintendo avoids the online fever that's sweeping the 128-bit scene, Warp Pipe Technologies continues to take the GameCube to a place where no Nintendo console has gone before. Warp Pipe 3.0 is now available for PC and Mac users who wish to take their GameCube online. Although Nintendo has only officially released three games to work with its LAN hardware – *Kirby Air Ride*, *1080° Avalanche* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* – Warp Pipe hopes that more developers will use the feature.

"In a time where most GameCube implementations of a multiplatform release are void of many features, including online gameplay, we believe that game developers and publishers will recognise the significant added value that Local Area Network functionality brings to a gaming community hungry for more interactivity," said Chad Paulson, founder of Warp Pipe Technologies. "I think the advent of Warp Pipe technology combined with the LAN functionality is a very attractive prospect for gamers and manufacturers, as publishers no longer have to worry about subsidising online costs for the life of a videogame."

We were interested to find out Nintendo's views on Warp Pipe, but Shelly Pearce, Head of PR at Nintendo Europe, revealed that she was "not aware of this product". However, Warp Pipe's community seems to have hit its stride, and if developers take Paulson's suggestions seriously it would show just how out of touch with online gaming Nintendo really is.



Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



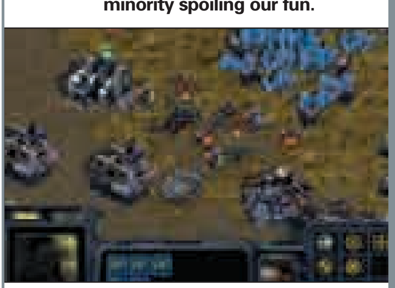
RAINBOW GAMING

We've lost track of the amount of different coloured GBAs that have been released in the last year so we're not surprised to see Microsoft and Sony pulling the same tricks. Microsoft's crystal Xbox is in shops now and there are plans to release a new *Halo* pack for Asia. Sony has also confirmed two more colours for PS2 owners in Japan. The Ceramic White PS2 is very similar to last year's PS2 racing pack, while the Sakura PS2 is new and looks very similar to Cherry Blossom. There's no word yet on a UK release for either machine.



CHEATS NEVER PROSPER

Fans of popular online game *StarCraft* had reason to celebrate recently when Blizzard got tough and shut down the accounts of 263,000 known cheats. If that wasn't enough, *WarCraft III* saw 19,000 accounts being banned, with 8,000 CD Keys that were linked to the accounts being suspended from the game's Ladder Play. Anyone who's played online will tell you how cheaters can ruin any gaming session, so it's great to see Blizzard taking such firm action. Hopefully other developers will take note and take similar measures to stop a minority spoiling our fun.

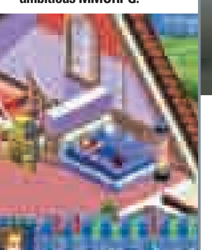




The *Doom*-esque *Ashen* is a gothicky blaster.



Pocket Kingdom is an ambitious MMORPG.



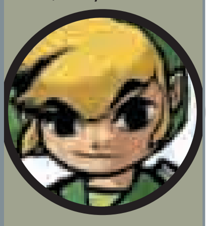
The Sims is already a hit – can it work on the QD?



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

Stick some pointy ears on *Love Actually* star Thomas Sangster and he could almost be Hyrule hero, Link. Ooh, scary.



NOKIA MAKES UP FOR THE N-GAGE WITH A BRAND NEW LOOK

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Nokia has finally revealed that an update for its N-Gage is ready and waiting to be unleashed. The N-Gage QD is a refined version of the original model and it would appear the mobile-phone giant has listened to many of the complaints that were levelled at the first machine. Of course, it was always obvious that a follow-up would appear, although no-one was expecting to see it announced so soon after the original N-Gage.

Although the N-Gage QD looks very similar to its forerunner, it does have several key differences that should help endear it to the more casual gamer. The most important improvement is the ability to swap games over in the same way you would on a Game Boy Advance rather than having to take the back off the phone-cum-console. Battery life has also been improved and the cumbersome (and ridiculous) need to hold the phone sideways to make calls will no longer be an issue, thanks to the inclusion of an earpiece on the front of the handset.

The overall size of the machine has also been reduced and Nokia has dispensed with the sharp angles of the original machine. Unfortunately, the disappointing screen layout remains, yet Mark Squires, director of corporate communications at Nokia UK, is adamant that this isn't an issue.

"The shape of the screen is irrelevant," Squires says. "It's the use of the games that are important. Some are better side-screen while others are better up-screen." However, anyone who's played the likes of *Sonic* will know how frustrating it is to play certain titles regardless of their layout.

Unsurprisingly, Nokia has yet to reveal how much the QD will cost and when it will actually launch, but Squires has hinted that we can expect a much lower price than the N-Gage. When you consider that consumer-friendly features like the MP3 player and radio have now been dropped, it's no surprise that we'll be able to spend a little less on what we felt was originally a rather extravagant purchase. Squires, however, thinks that the N-Gage was always reasonably priced. "The original N-Gage incorporated console-quality gaming, an MP3 player, FM radio and tri-band mobile phone – its price point offered fantastic value for money for this level of functionality," he says.

When it debuted in October last year, the N-Gage immediately came under fire due to its poor design – it was difficult and time-consuming to change games, and making a call meant holding the handset awkwardly. Nevertheless, Nokia feels that the first iteration of the N-Gage

Battery life has been improved, but the screen is still an awkward shape for some types of game.


The whole design of the handset has been modified to take away some of the original model's clunkiness.


Importantly, changing games won't involve removing the back of the machine.

was nothing but a success. "We sold 600,000 over the holiday period with 100,000 of this in the UK, representing a strong performance and confirming that the N-Gage is a concept that excites gamers," says Squires. "As with all new consoles we have come in for some criticism, but our sales show that we have tapped into the imagination of gamers and are delivering a product that excites and inspires them. The N-Gage is a unique proposition and we are leading the mobile gaming market."

It may have had a questionable start as far as gamers were concerned, but at least Nokia is willing to show that it is happy to respond to criticism. Ultimately, however, we can't help feeling that the N-Gage QD is a classic example of 'too little, too late' and will do little to change the public's perception of Nokia's current gaming endeavours. Squires is vehement, however, that this is simply not the case. "The N-Gage QD demonstrates our commitment to the games industry and our ability to respond to public feedback much faster than the industry is used to," he says.

While we find it admirable that Nokia has moved so swiftly to address the original N-Gage's shortcomings, we can't help but feel that if it had managed to get the design right in the first place, none of this would have been necessary.

"IT MAY HAVE HAD A BAD START IN THE GAMING WORLD, BUT THIS SHOWS THAT NOKIA IS HAPPY TO RESPOND TO CRITICISM"

THREE TO LOOK FORWARD TO

It's safe to say that the N-Gage's release list has been average at best and has seriously lacked original content. Fortunately, Nokia has rectified this and upcoming titles will focus on the N-Gage's key features, namely multiplayer gaming. For the moment, though, let's look at some of the more promising titles that are on the way…

Ashen

Similar to *Doom* and *Quake*, *Ashen* is a gothic horror-filled blaster that promises to improve on all the faults of the N-Gage's *Red Faction II*. It's already looking impressive and will allow deathmatches for up to four players. There's also a Ghost Vision mode that enables players to uncover previously hidden monsters and objects.

The Sims Bustin' Out

An update of the excellent GBA version, *Bustin' Out* should be just the thing for gamers on the move. There are lots of tasks to complete in order to unlock items and money, and we're expecting the QD to use its Bluetooth ability. There's a huge selection of NPCs to interact with and EA has promised that the N-Gage version will feature new items and mini-games that are exclusive to the platform.

Pocket Kingdom

This has the potential to be huge – Nokia and SEGA are collaborating on the world's first mobile MMORPG. Games will allow players to take part in huge online battles. It's definitely one of Nokia's most ambitious titles and gives a clear indication of where it wants to take mobile gaming. Let's just hope that it's a direction that gamers want to take as well.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



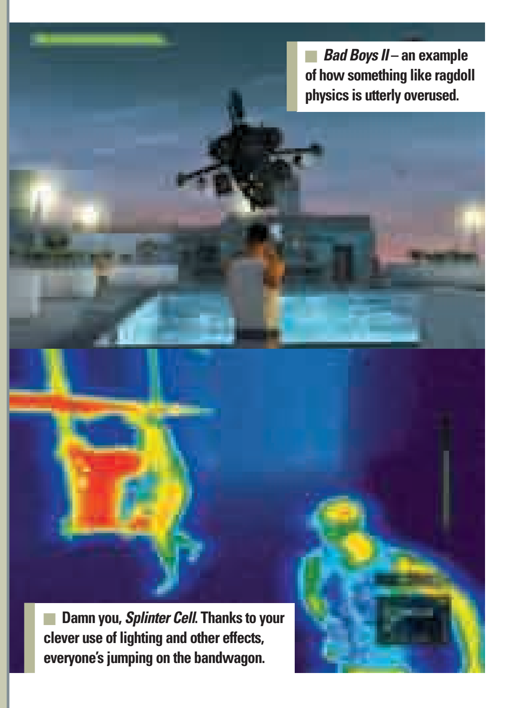


NO.18: THIS SEASON'S FAVOURITE

Obviously, we've moaned about the problem of bandwagon jumping countless times before, but things have begun to get worse. For example, we've started seeing a flock of games using various 'popular' ideas purely for the sake of it – taking concepts introduced by a handful of titles and sticking them in simply so they can be used as a unique selling point.

Of course, exactly what today's favourite concept is takes some guessing; some would say it's ragdoll physics (which virtually every enemy-based game seems to feature) while others might favour complex lighting. Or how about specialist 'goggle' effects like heat- or night-vision? Thankfully, cel-shading appears to have had its day, but that just means that other overused nuances are coming to the fore.

What makes things worse, though, is that most of the games using such ideas don't even do them as well as the games they're copying, let alone improve on them; from Bad Boys II's ridiculously exaggerated ragdoll system to Alias' rather dodgy attempt at stealth, it's just another case of developer complacency. But here's a thought – what about coming up with something original? It's not like it hasn't been done before…


Bad Boys II – an example of how something like ragdoll physics is utterly overused.

Damn you, *Splinter Cell*. Thanks to your clever use of lighting and other effects, everyone's jumping on the bandwagon.

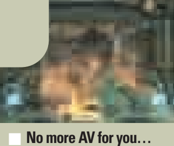


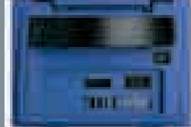
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

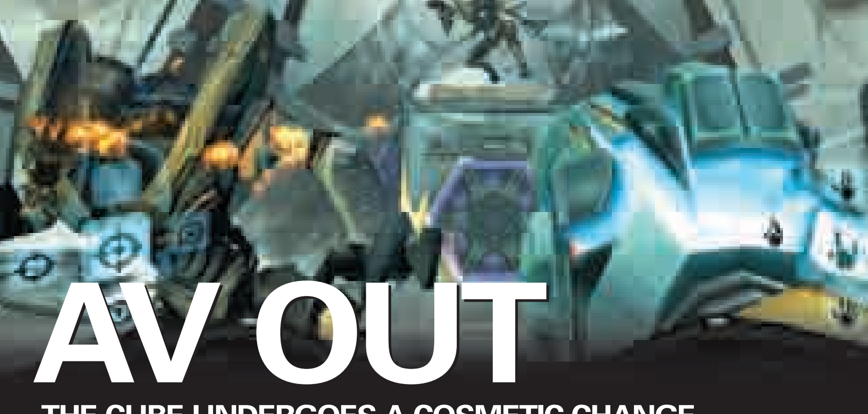


YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN NOW

The future looks increasingly bleak for Nintendo's GameCube as the number of Western publishers choosing not to release their major multiformat titles on the struggling console continues to grow. The latest blow comes as both Electronic Arts and Codemasters have refused to create a Cube version of their officially licensed football titles that will accompany the Euro 2004 Championships (*UEFA Euro 2004* and *England International Football* respectively). With no Cube titles in the pipeline from the likes of Eidos, Atari and LucasArts, it looks like Nintendo's E3 showing will rely almost entirely on enticing sequels from its own stable. But will their quality be enough to support the machine?


No more AV for you…


…if you're in Japan.



AV OUT

THE CUBE UNDERGOES A COSMETIC CHANGE…

Import fans used to having their GameCube titles being compatible with HDTV and progressive scan will be upset to learn that the Digital AV port is to be dropped from Japanese versions of the machine. The reason for the change isn't clear, though it does coincide with a price drop for most of Nintendo's Japanese products. In response to Japanese legislation stating that products in shops must be displayed with a price that includes five per cent sales tax (so a ¥200 item would now seem to cost ¥210), Nintendo has dropped its prices. A GameCube's ¥14,000 price remains unchanged, though this figure now includes the sales tax. However, any Nintendo products released before 22 March this year will be subject to the sales tax. So has the AV port been dropped in order to cut costs? Quite possibly.

A limited number of Cubes with the AV port will still be made, but otherwise the feature now looks redundant. It's not yet been revealed if developers will be dropping HDTV and progressive scan from future titles, but judging by how good games like *Metroid Prime* can look in progressive scan we're expecting the option to remain.

Consoles go through hardware changes all the time, with the most recent example being Sony's removal of the little-used i-Link port from the PlayStation2, so we're hardly surprised to see Nintendo getting rid of such an underused feature.



"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Guerilla's managing director, Hermen Hulst, speaks about the recently inked exclusivity deal with Sony Europe

""We are looking forward to working exclusively with SCEE, in order to establish Guerilla as one of the finest development studios in Europe"

games™ says: No doubt the gigantic cheque that Sony wrote you will come in handy too. Talk about spoiling other people's plans though – what now for Eidos' *Shellshock: Nam 67*, eh?

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

MICROSOFT REVEALS NEW STAFF

NEW MEN AT MICROSOFT

Following the departure of Ed Fries from Microsoft, Shane Kim has been announced as the new acting manager for Microsoft Game Studios. Kim will oversee huge titles like *Halo 2* and *Perfect Dark Zero* and will report to Peter Moore, who has been appointed head of worldwide content and marketing for Microsoft games and game products.

Microsoft's chief Xbox officer, Robbie Bach, announced the appointments, saying that the new crew would enable Microsoft to concentrate on building its growth in the retail and gaming markets.

"Peter Moore has been a key figure in the games industry for several years," said Bach. "Having him at the helm of our global marketing and content business is a natural fit." Moore was previously president and COO of SEGA of America and joined Microsoft at the beginning of 2003. Shane Kim, on the other hand, has been with Microsoft for eight years having joined the company as an intern.

With the next generation of consoles moving ever closer, we're not surprised to see restructures such as this. Don't be surprised if other companies bring in fresh blood to prepare for the future.

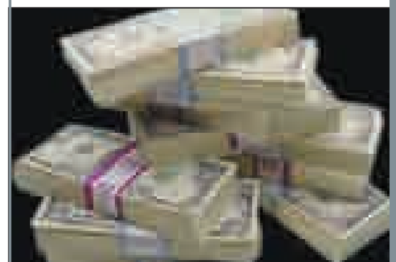
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

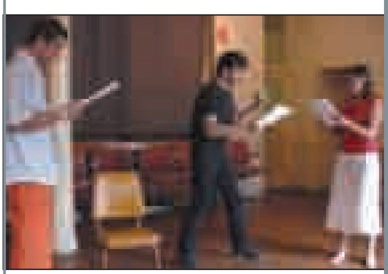
A recent report by DFC Intelligence projects that videogame industry revenues are set to overtake those of the music industry within the next five years. DFC president David Cole said such revenues were reflected by the costs involved in producing today's big titles. "Production values are starting to compare with those in feature films," he said, citing examples like "increasing consumer expectations, the rising cost of talent, the need for large-scale marketing campaigns, adding online components, and demand for high profile licensed properties."



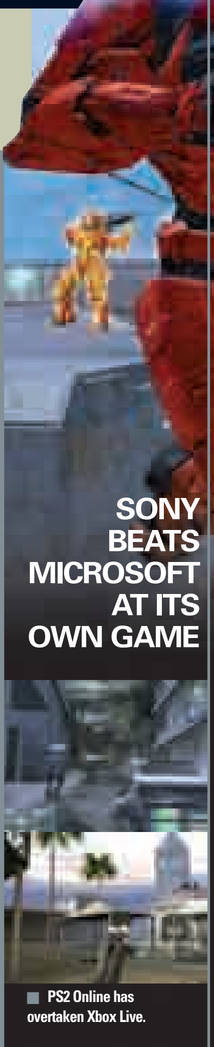


THE TRUTH WILL OUT

Try as it might to play its *San Andreas* cards close to its chest, Rockstar can't keep the smallest of tidbits leaking out. Thanks to a casting call through LA agency Shadowfax, three characters for the game and a rough idea of settings have become apparent. Maccer, Mad Dogg and Maria are the trio in question – for audition purposes, characters and lines have been chosen from *Human Traffic, Menace II Society* and *Colors*, leading many to believe that the game will enjoy a mid-Nineties setting. Naturally, Rockstar remains tight-lipped as ever…







SONY BEATS MICROSOFT AT ITS OWN GAME

XBOX LIVE? NO THANKS…

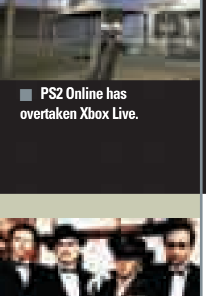
The console war is a bitter business, with all three major companies constantly using pages of figures and statistics to make their machines seem more popular than the other consoles.

With Microsoft and Nintendo both being extremely pleased with recent figures for Xbox Live and sales of the the GameCube, Sony has announced its own figures that put its rivals to shame. It's been revealed that over 25 million PlayStation2s have now been sold in the US, with 2.6 million of the machines online-enabled. On top of this, Sony has stated that over a million gamers are currently using its PS2 Online service.

"While our competitors strive to meet the new standards we've laid before them, our focus remains fixed on driving the momentum of our platform and the industry forward," announced SCEA's president, Kaz Hirai. This is sure to be a bitter pill for Microsoft to swallow, as it's recently been celebrating the fact that Xbox Live now has over 750,000 users, which doesn't look so impressive now compared to PS2 Online.

Of course, Microsoft has not revealed the percentage of Live kits sold in relation to machines, but this latest news suggests that it will be wanting the likes of *Halo 2* and *Doom III* to appear sooner rather than later…

PS2 Online has overtaken Xbox Live.



Will EA's game be an offer we can't refuse?



EA GROWS UP

ELECTRONIC ARTS' LATEST GAME IS DEFINITELY NOT FOR KIDS

Electronic Arts had a surprise up its sleeve at the Bear Stearns 17th Annual Media, Entertainment and Information Conference last month, when it revealed it's working on a game based on classic movie *The Godfather*.

The publisher and developer is famous for releasing family-friendly products like its award-winning *Sims* series and the James Bond and Harry Potter franchises, so a title that EA's chief financial officer, Warren Jenson, said may come with an 'M' rating seems rather out of place (this would mean that in the US the game would be unavailable to children under 17). However, when you consider the success Rockstar has had with its *GTA* series the news makes a lot more sense.

Jenson is adamant that this doesn't herald a completely new direction for the company and explained to delegates that: "There will be titles that will sell well on that fringe, but you don't have to be there in order to do well in the marketplace, to develop software that will sell."

While we're sure that *GTA*-styled games with EA's typically high production values would generate huge revenues for the company and could herald a new direction for the company, Lisa Artemis, PR executive for Game, is certain this won't be the case. "I don't think there is anything significant in the fact that EA is looking at publishing a game with more mature content," Artemis said. "What is important, however, is the quality of gameplay, and the look and feel of the game itself. We're confident that EA won't disappoint."



AS PRESIDENT OF SEGA OF AMERICA, PETER MOORE PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN CHANGING THE COMPANY'S BUSINESS STRATEGY FROM A HARDWARE MANUFACTURER TO A MULTI-PLATFORM SOFTWARE COMPANY. NOW HE'S IN CHARGE OF MARKETING AND PUBLISHING AT MICROSOFT GAMES. AND HE'S VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF XBOX GAMING…

CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT

PETER MOORE

Four years ago, Bill Gates unveiled the first Xbox at the Game Developers' Conference in San José, so with talk of the next next generation of consoles rife, we were happy to be invited by Microsoft to the GDC for this year's big announcement. After rousing speeches from chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach and corporate vice president J Allard, Microsoft unveiled XNA – its cross-platform, next-generation architecture. The news hardly seemed Earth-shattering, until you saw the demos and realised that this is, in fact, Xbox 2 in action.

Speaking after the announcement of XNA, Peter Moore, corporate vice president of retail, sales and marketing for Microsoft's home entertainment division, is keen to evangelise about the company's next-generation strategy, which he believes will make game development a much less painful process. "XNA is a cross-platform, industry-wide software development platform, bringing both the worlds of Windows and Xbox together and focusing on making our developers lives an awful lot easier, allowing them to make better games faster," he says. "We see one of the issues going into the next generation as the cost of development. That's something that Microsoft, probably unlike any other company in the world, can bring dev support to these folks and help them get through what potentially could be a very expensive undertaking, as we look at the expectations of the consumers and what they expect from the next generation of hardware. We're going to change it from being a hardware problem to a software solution."

Microsoft claims that only 20 per cent of developer time is used in the creative process, with the other 80 per cent swallowed up writing routines and software to create the backbone of the game. As games become more elaborate, the costs and time involved in developing new titles skyrockets. Cutting down on the time developers spend writing code to get their games up and running is the main aim for XNA. Demonstrating the power of the new development suite, Moore invites us to play three tech demos that took two months each to create: *Crash*, *Film Noir* and *Xenomorph*. Running on a Windows XP system with a next-generation ATI card, these demos are close to what we can expect from Xbox 2, as Moore admits the demos are "the opening salvo in the next generation, but it's not about the hardware, it's about the software. [Developers] don't have to wait for the silicon, they can already begin to work on the core underpinnings of a game without having to wait for the hardware to come to them in the form of an XDK [Xbox Development Kit] because we're now providing, through XNA, the tools necessary to start building what the game is all about. I think that's going to be the differentiator."

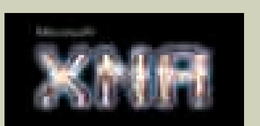
Microsoft is under no illusions that PlayStation2 has won the current console war, but Moore is in fighting spirit. "We will win the battle with Sony next time around because we intend to make it a software battle," he says. "There's no company that has used its ability to embrace its developers, to allow them to build games, better than Microsoft. It's not going to be about hardware – clearly that plays very well into Sony's strengths as a consumer electronics company – it really will be about software. And the benefits that we're going to be able to provide for developers will then be seen in the types of games that consumers are going to be able to play in this generation of Xbox." So Microsoft plans to make producing games for Xbox 2 such a creatively liberating experience that it will be able to tempt the industry's key developers away from Sony? Moore seems to think so. "In the last 12 months more and more developers have made Xbox the lead platform and have then ported down to PS2 if they believe they need to make their game multiplatform. A number of developers – and some big games that you'll see a lot of at E3 – are specific to our platforms because they get the performance out of the Xbox environment and they can't actually get it into a PS2 environment because a) it's a difficult development environment and b) it's not powerful enough to be able to render the type of resolution we're seeing in these games."



"WE'RE GOING TO KNOCK DOWN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN THE PC AND XBOX WITH XBOX LIVE AND OPEN UP AN INCREDIBLY LARGE WORLD WITH THE ABILITY TO BRING GAMERS TOGETHER REGARDLESS OF WHAT PLATFORM THEY'RE PLAYING ON"

EVOLVE GDC>04 SPECIAL REPORT

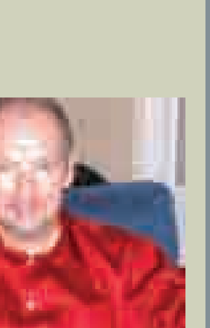
Film Noir (one of the three XNA demos) wasn't particularly interactive but showed off some highly impressive graphical effects.



XNA stands for Cross-platform, Next-generation Architecture, in case you were wondering.

Of course, Sony did a great job weaning its PlayStation owners onto PlayStation2 with backward compatibility, and will undoubtedly be trying to do the same with the PS3, does this cause Moore any sleepless nights? "[The] installed base of PS2 is an issue for us, but the great thing about this industry is that there's a time when the next generation comes and all bets are off," he says. "Right now we have a very large installed base, we have the best online gaming network, there are no naysayers any more that doubt our credibility. We're going to have tens of millions of great Xbox consumers following us into the next generation. We clearly have established a very strong number-two position both here in the US as well as in Europe. I think when you bring all that to bear it's a whole different ballgame going into the next generation…" Moore pauses, "Which, by the way, began this morning."

There's no doubting Xbox Live's innovation, but Microsoft has been having problems bringing giants like Electronic Arts on board; can Xbox online gaming survive without them? With EA's vast catalogue of lucrative licensed titles, it would be valuable to have the publisher under Xbox Live's wing. And Moore thinks that EA may eventually come round. "Clearly, EA is a great partner of ours, they're [the] number one third-party publisher on Xbox and Windows. Our biggest challenge right now is in Europe; we wish broadband would hurry up and become a lot more ubiquitous, we wish we were able to resolve some of the issues about credit cards. Those are the bigger issues right now, not the lack of games. We have 70 great games and growing on the platform – more than every gamer would want. We are constantly in communication with EA about the business differences we have but right now we're very happy with where we are with Xbox Live. One of these days they'll probably see the light!"



"ONE OF THESE DAYS EA WILL PROBABLY SEE THE LIGHT"
PETER MOORE, CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT, MICROSOFT GAMES

Xbox Live is certainly revolutionary, but what new developments can we expect to see on the service over the next 12 months? "We're over 100,000 users for Live in Europe, but we'd like to be a little bit more," Moore explains. "I think that *Halo 2* is going to be a huge boost to that number, certainly *Project Gotham Racing 2* was. The massively multiplayer online RPG is a world that I think we need to bring together, and XNA is truly cross-platform so if there is one type of game genre where a Windows PC user and an Xbox user can come together and compete and collaborate it's in the online RPG. I think we're going to see more and more the blending of our platforms. We're going to provide toolkits for our Windows and Xbox developers for Xbox Live and then it's up to them, this is the classic Microsoft way – 'here it is guys, here's all the tools, we're providing the platform, you provide the applications and the creativity to bring it together'. We're going to knock down the barriers between the PC and Xbox with Xbox Live and open up an incredibly large world with the ability to bring gamers together regardless of what platform they're playing on."

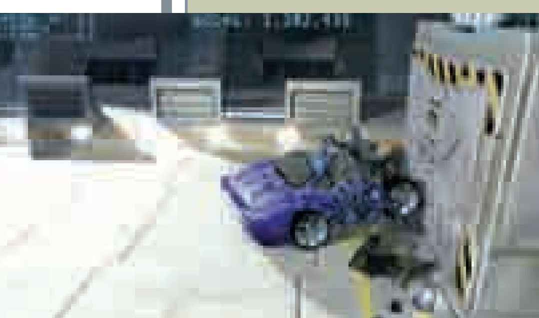
While a killer app in the shape of an MMORPG would be great on Live, the European gamer is really hoping for a playable online football game. Is Microsoft any closer to delivering this? "We've started to make some progress with Xbox Live soccer, a Codemasters game as well as *Winning Eleven* from Konami being announced for the platform. So we're delighted to be able to start building our content for the Live service, but we can still see some holes." Well, that's good news, but a big concern for Xbox gamers is that Live will allow publishers to push their games out unfinished, using downloads to patch the game later on. This has already begun with *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, so how does Moore see the system



This was the eighteenth Game Developers' Conference, and the last to be held in San José. Next time, the industry's finest will be off to San Francisco.







The *Crash* program demonstrated some impeccable car physics and there's a chance it could be developed into a full game for the launch of Xbox 2.

progressing? "Our plan is to enhance the game experience by providing downloads, missions, quests, extra levels in the future – really starting to blow out the expanse of the game over a period of time. I'm always loath to use the phrase 'episodic content' because it makes developers shiver, but ultimately I think it's something we will see in our industry. In Japan, *Phantasy Star Online* does astonishingly well because Sonic Team constantly makes missions and quests available on a monthly basis, which keeps the game fresh and gamers are willing to pay extra. This is our vision of what Xbox Live will be."

XNA (CROSS-PLATFORM NEXT-GENERATION ARCHITECTURE)

Microsoft believes that the next-generation war will be fought with software rather than hardware and XNA is its powerful development platform for Windows, mobile and Xbox 2 games. It brings together technologies and tools from Microsoft and its partners to provide developers with a quicker way to the creative side of game design. The technology system makes the groundwork of any game easier, so that more time and resources can be put into pushing genres further, creating new and more exciting environments, and moving the games industry on to the next generation. Current games are created with development tools such as Direct X, High-Level Shader Language, XACT, PIX and Xaudio. XNA gives a developer a suite of tools that includes all of these, but it's also an ever-growing project where experiences and technology developed by other studios will be pulled together to aid future game production. The result should be the most amazing games ever created – and an exciting launch line-up for Xbox 2.

Crash

Developed by: Pseudo Interactive

With the nuts-and-bolts work for this demo made easier with XNA, Pseudo Interactive's David Wu was able to use his expertise in car physics to create a highly realistic crash model. The demo allows the speed to be tampered with, along with the incline of the ramp and angle of the barrier. The car splinters into thousands of pieces on impact, and once the bodywork has crumpled, accurate double-wishbone suspension can be seen. This demo is rumoured to become a launch game for Xbox 2.

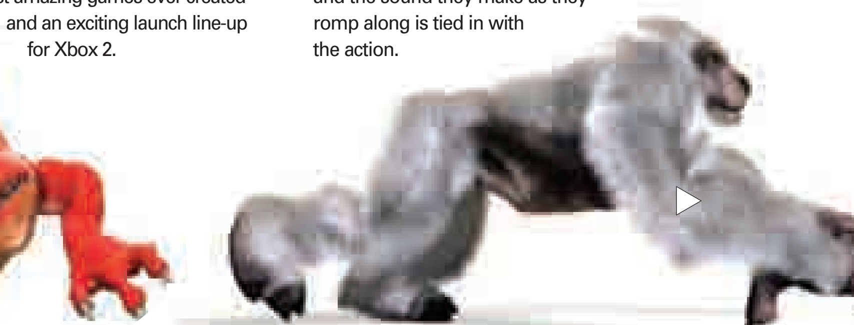
Film Noir

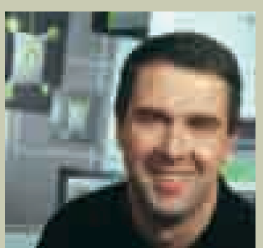
Developed by: Xbox Advanced Technology Group

The Xbox Advanced Technology Group is led by Laura Fryer, one of the founders of the Microsoft 'Women in Gaming' sessions at GDC. Strange then, that she would choose to create a sexy film noir demo starring a sultry temptress. Control of the demo is limited, but the user can pan in and out, circle around and order a drink from a robo-waitress. XNA allowed the development team to work more on the ambience and detailed environments, rather than the basic coding that would normally be needed.

Xenomorph **Developed by: High Voltage**

While the current crop of games involve the creation of visuals first and audio second, XNA has allowed High Voltage to marry the two together in a way previously only known in big-budget animated movies. The sound engineer worked side-by-side with the animators to create a demo where creatures morph from one to another seamlessly, and the sound they make as they romp along is tied in with the action.





"THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY MUST BAND TOGETHER TO FIND A SOLUTION THAT ENSURES VITALITY… FOR YEARS TO COME"

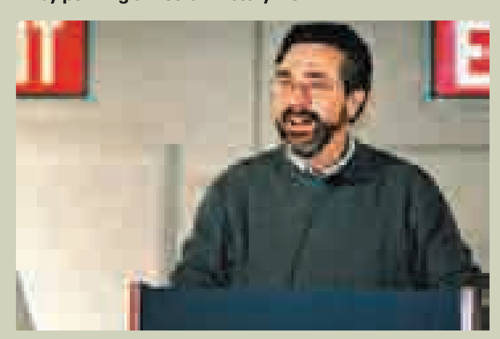
ROBERT J. BACH, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GAMES DIVSION, MICROSOFT CORP.

SPEAK YOUR BRAINS

This year's GDC once again saw some of the industry's most distinguished figures taking to the stage to share a few pearls of wisdom with us mere mortals…

WARREN SPECTOR

Famed for designing such multi-branching masterpieces as *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Warren Spector's address covered the nature of game narrative and the experience-management problems presented by penning a 'freeform' storyline.



PETER MOLYNEUX

Molyneux had examples from hotly anticipated projects *Black & White 2* and *Fable* on hand to demonstrate the various types of advanced AI developers are now creating, including the complex systems bringing the *Fable* universe to life.



JOHN CARMACK

id's master programmer Carmack covered a range of subjects and offered a thoughtful insight into the future of the industry, highlighting how technological complexity is making the development process more of a chore than a creative art.





GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

SO WHAT ELSE WENT ON AT THE GDC WHEN MICROSOFT WASN'T BUSY STEALING THE SHOW?

It could have been the best of times, it could have been the worst of times, but the feeling for many visiting this year's Game Developers' Conference was that the show was neither. Certainly, announcements of what was to come raised expectations for not just this year's E3 but for future shows, and Microsoft's admittedly interesting – but also forehead-smackingly obvious, given its take on convergence technology – XNA announcement definitely stole the show. However, the overall mood was somewhat subdued compared to previous years, perhaps indicating that the industry is finally focusing on the here and now, rather than simply crowing about its future plans. The XNA bombshell notwithstanding, there were plenty of other announcements to keep the average newshound happy for a weekend.

The majority of the unveilings focused purely on games and, more specifically, on the current generation of hardware – which is good news, obviously – but we were left sorely wanting when it came to fresh titles. With Epic's demonstration of the new Unreal 3.0 engine and the continuation of the *Serious Sam* and *Oddworld* franchises being pretty much as good as it got as far as brand new revelations went, the remaining games were simply improved versions of titles we already knew were coming: *Black & White 2* and *Fable* from Lionhead; *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Red Ninja* and *Leisure Suit Larry* from Vivendi; *Jade Empire* from the stars at BioWare; and more besides. Not that we're complaining, of course – after all, new chances to play on anticipated titles are always a plus – but those hoping for GDC to act as a taster for the upcoming E3 were left disappointed.

Interestingly, it was Sony that came away from the show with a much-deserved second place (something that the Japanese giant must see as a rare occurrence), despite its relatively low-key presence at the event. Sony's booth offered plenty of experiences for the wandering visitor, such as hard-drive-using appearances of *Final Fantasy XI* and *Resident Evil: Outbreak*; the 'unlikely to make it out of Japan at this rate' genius that is *Mojib Ribon*; karaoke goodness in

"TODAY WE'RE RENDERING A MILLION POLYGONS A SECOND IN MANY CASES AND WE'RE STILL A LONG WAY FROM WHAT YOU WOULD CALL PHOTOREALISTIC"
JOHN CARMACK, ID SOFTWARE









Sony's presence was relatively low-key, but news of the PSP and the number of developers who are on board was impressive.

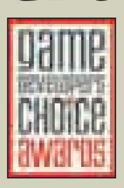
the form of *SingStar*, and also *EyeToy: Groove*, which proved so popular that some attendees had to stand in line just to make fools of themselves in front of everyone.

Yet just as everyone thought Sony's modest showing might have been simple damage limitation against Microsoft's domination, the company's big presentation introduced the world to *Death Jr* – the very first officially confirmed PSP title, currently in joint development between Digital Eclipse and Backbone Entertainment. While the usual mix of a free-roaming 3D world, a cute central character with a flair all of his own, and numerous enemies to pummel isn't anything new, the fact that a game that is graphically equal to an early PS2 offering is running on Sony's handheld hardware raises our spirits. What's more, the game is being touted as a PSP exclusive that'll be ready for the machine's US launch in spring 2005. Needless to say, the anticipation is already making our mouths water…

It was the PSP that proved to be Sony's trump card at the show, with several members of the development community on hand to show their approval. Official Sony sources confirm that the platform currently has 81 developers working on titles for it – with 34 in Europe, 23 in the US and 24 in Japan – which backs up suggestions that the handheld is becoming something of a darling within the games industry.

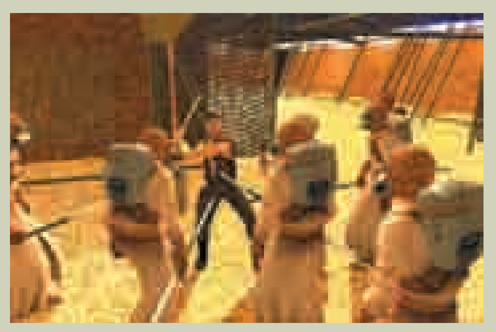
Whether Sony will be able to back this up with a quality launch line-up remains to be seen – *Death Jr* aside, no other games have been confirmed for the console, and claims that PS2 titles can be ported onto a PSP in as little as four weeks (a genuine comment from Digital Eclipse's Chris Charla) fills us with a fear that there will be a massive deluge of lacklustre ports from the PS2's back catalogue. Still, Sony has the best part of a year to ensure victory and, of course, there will almost certainly be even more revelations at this year's E3…

GDC AWARDS

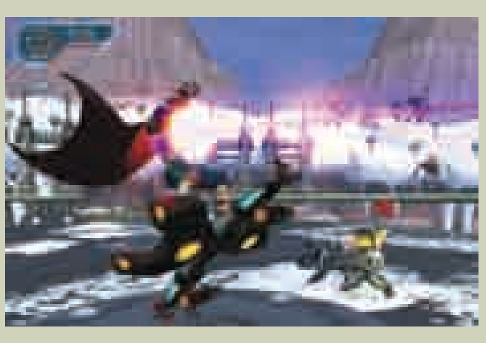


While most of the conference was spent looking to the future of gaming, the fourth annual Game Developers' Choice Awards was an opportunity for developers to celebrate the achievements of their peers over the past year. These are a few of the big winners…

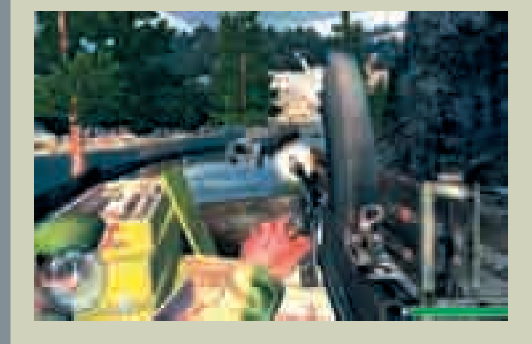
BioWare scooped four awards, including Game of the Year and the Excellence in Writing award for *Star Wars: KOTOR*. Droid HK-47 was voted Original Game Character of the Year. Bioware's Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka won the Community Contribution award.



The Lifetime Achievement award went to Mark Cerny for his involvement in the *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Ratchet & Clank* franchises, while rhythm action pioneer Masaya Matsura won the First Penguin award for innovation.



***Call Of Duty* developer Infinity Ward scooped the Rookie Studio and Excellence in Audio awards, while Ubisoft collected the Excellence in Programming and Excellence in Game Design gongs for *The Sands Of Time*. *The Wind Waker* won the Excellence in Visual Arts prize.**



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"ONLINE GAMING PUT SOMETHING BACK IN MY LIFE THAT WAS DEARLY FROM WONDROUS TECHNOLOGY AND AGGRESSIVE CORPORATE GREED IS

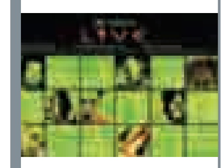
A while back in these pages, I made passing mention of gratitude towards Microsoft – not the sort of thing to be done lightly. This was for creating and providing the Xbox Live service, a modern gaming benefit that is no doubt great fun wherever you are, but which holds a dear place in my heart for facilitating superb long-distance play with my old friends back in Britain. Since then, things have got a bit out of hand.

These were people with whom I played in person on a daily basis; everything from *Twisted Metal 2* to *Halo*, *SEGA Bass Fishing* to *Perfect Dark*. Then, abruptly after initiating Operation Escape From Britain Because It Sucks, all that was gone. The banter, camaraderie, friendly competition… believe me, it leaves a gap. The sensation is not quite homesickness, but it comes from the same place. All the long-distance phone calls, emails and instant messaging sessions in the world can't fill the void of gaming loneliness. It's not like Americans won't sit down and play a game with you, but it's an experience so dissimilar that the appetite remains unsatisfied. For a start, all commentary must concern the posterior: they're kicking our asses; you just got your ass handed to you; kiss my ass and so on. There's a lot of hooting and hollering and woo yeah, how d'ya like that. And, uncomfortably, it is not outside the realm of possibility that you will be offered another man's palm to slap in response to victory. Think of your group of gaming friends now. Can you imagine the reaction if you were to throw in a celebratory high five? The hospital would need dental records to identify you.

What I needed was real gaming, with my real British mates, all of whom are tremendously accomplished at real swearing. I got it, in a big way, when I hooked up to Xbox Live. What I thought would be an occasional distraction hit my daily life like a train. No sooner has the notion of checking my UK-centric friends list to see who's online crossed my mind than the day and night are lost. Generally, someone is around. By the time they depart, a few more have shown up. On it goes until I can no longer see clearly.

The whole experience seems to have caught all of us in a trap of voluntary addiction, all the way over the Atlantic. One in our midst, a journalist who shall remain nameless, largely for the purposes of blackmail, is known for playing horizontally from bed whilst consuming inadvisable quantities of red wine, staving off the effects of an obnoxious heating system. "One more go," he'll slur at 3am, as four of us lie cold and bleeding on the concrete floor of *Rainbow Six 3*'s punishing Meat Packing Plant. "We've got to do it."

In many cases, morning has broken for my UK pals before we all agree it might be time to turn off. Snatching only three hours sleep because you wished to assure a team victory on Cat & Mouse at the Nürburgring? That's friendship. I hear about them crashing into work the next day, glazing through meetings,



Live – life-devouring yet strangely life-affirming.



MISSED. A CONCOCTION BREWED JUST THE TONIC TO CURE MY BLUES"

amputating the wrong limbs, bombing the wrong islands; while on my side the time difference makes for a usual night's sleep. But, you know, I feel for them.

This is not me trying to tell you online gaming is great, like you don't already have an opinion on the matter. It's me telling you that this amazing tool put something back in my life that was dearly missed. A concoction brewed from wondrous technology and aggressive corporate greed has proven just the tonic to cure my blues. My closest friend and I, now thousands of miles removed from one another, can kick back, chat the night away and shoot each other, just like the old days. Just as easily, a dozen of us can convene in a sort of Old Boys meet-up. This service bridges one hell of a gap and I am grateful.

In the bigger picture of online, I'm not claiming ignorance of the problems. The Live rush is systematically devouring the single-player convention, which it seems to me should remain the heart of a game. (1Up-lite games like *Counter-Strike* still don't come home with me.) Then there's the devilry of 'premium' downloads, or the staggering number of assholes waiting for you to stray off your friends list, or the occasional lag even on a 3.0Mb pipe… None of which means I want to spend another day without an active subscription.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

John Peel



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Cape Cod



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

CELEBRITY POKER



Ben Affleck, someone you thought was dead off *Thirtysomething* and various interchangeable cast members of *The West Wing* gather to play high-stakes poker for the charities of their choosing. Ben's view of the table obscured by his very talent, he loses.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume	GC
2	MVP Baseball 2004	EA Sports	Multi
3	Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Xbox
4	Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes	Konami	GC
5	The Suffering	Midway	Multi
6	Drakengard	Square Enix	PS2
7	Call Of Duty	Activision	PC
8	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	Multi
9	Breakdown	Namco	Xbox
10	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	GC

(Updated 21/3/04)



Harvest Moon

MVP Baseball 2004

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I NOW HAVE GAME BOY GAMES TO PLAY ON THE TRAIN – JUST LIKE A SO I'VE INVENTED THE 'YAMANOTE SCORING SYSTEM



Can't play on a real train? Pretend to drive one at home, instead…

If you recall your games™ continuum correctly, just recently I combined a black Game Boy Advance with a white battery lid, and I was having angry issues about the price of game software in Japan. So I found a solution – beg for games. It wasn't hard. I have a lot of fans on the internet, and most of them are at least half as strange as me, so it amounted to my getting a lot of Game Boy Advance games sent to me from all over the world. I've been collecting them in this pink nylon drawstring bag that my thieving former roommate was using to keep the Game Boy Advance all alone because he had no games.

Anyway, just two weeks ago I finished writing the first volume of my new two-volume novel, so I decided to get out of the house for a week; this meant taking a poor man's inner-Tokyo vacation aboard the Yamanote Line. The Yamanote Line is a legendary piece of transportation – it goes in a circle mostly, meaning you can board it at Ikebukuro and if you ride for an hour you'll be back in Ikebukuro. Some people live to quote Yamanote trivia that they think only they know, like how it's not really a loop because at one point it becomes the Tohoku Line, only the name doesn't change. I say forget that – all you need to know is that the Yamanote Line is marked on maps with a bright green, that it has 29 stops (fact: prime numbers are one of the few things I like more than games), and that I call the hobby of riding the Yamanote around and around in circles 'Shooting Hoops', which I stole from the final track of *Ridge Racer 4*. Even in the middle of the night, the train's lighting is harsh enough to play Game Boy games without squinting. Now, though, thanks to various generous readers, I have Game Boy games to play on the train, like your typical Japanese salaryman, and the experience inspires me to invent the 'Yamanote Scoring System for Portable Games'.

I make a note of the station the train had just left when I turn the game on, and then count backwards from the station the train is approaching when I take the game out. The game's final score is anywhere from 1 to 29+, the latter meaning that I managed to play the game for an entire loop without going crazy. My good friend Hideo Kojima and I were talking a couple of weeks back about how Japanese people who play videogames on the train are usually listening to their own MiniDisc music mixes on headphones. Kojima laments this, saying: "We put a lot of work into the music on *Boktai*." So a caveat of my scoring system is that I have to be listening to each game's music while playing the game on the train.

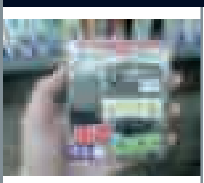
The only game, so far, to score a one (and this is based only on games sent to me by sadistic readers, mostly from Europe) is *Kirby's Block Ball*, which was just too damned bland. John Lappin, UK resident and loyal **games™** reader, sent me *Advance*



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON EIGHTEEN: TRAIN TALK DEFENCE

Ne oniisan, nande ge-mu yatteruno?	Hey mister, why are you playing games?
Aa! Kore wa ore no shigoto dayo! Zasshi no koramu kaiterundayo	Oh! This is my job! I write a column for a magazine
Aa sounanda? Donna zasshi?	Oh really? What kind of magazine?
Anou, fasshon no zasshi dayo!	Uh, it's a fashion magazine!
[Kore wa ENN-GEEJI dattara hazukashikunainaa]	[I wouldn't be so embarrassed if this were an N-Gage…]



It's ¥980 in this photo, though I swear I've seen it for ¥480.



Is the guy next to me reading… games™?! (He is, as it happens)

JAPANESE SALARYMAN – FOR PORTABLE GAMES'"

Wars 2, which was fortunate enough to score a 67 before the repetitive music got to me. *Mario & Luigi* gets a 58, because I ran into a wall about two hours in at this place where you have to navigate through a maze of barrels, where you can't see the road. *Final Fantasy Legend* scored a 9, taking me only from Ikebukuro to Okachimachi, because I realised after 18 minutes that my nostalgia was a pathological liar. The highest score so far is Nintendo's 1991 masterpiece *Metroid II: Return Of Samus*, with an 88. I blame the ambient pieces of music, spare enough for you to still hear the train announcements in the outside world.

I kind of like my new scoring system. How I'm going to manage to make money off it, I don't know yet. All I know is that I have to make money off it somehow, for justice's sake. I used to meet women Shooting Hoops, but now they all just look at me like another dumb foreign bastard playing games when he could be enjoying the scenery of the most-travelled line of transportation in the world.

Kind regards



A TRAIN WITHIN A TRAIN

If you cannot afford a plane ticket Japan and/or like pain, you can always just buy a Bandai WonderSwan for ¥980 and a copy of the Yamanote Line *Densha de Go!* for ¥480.

The WonderSwan is a poor man's Game Boy, with a million little candy-shaped buttons that stab your fingers when pressed, and Squaresoft only put its *Final Fantasy IV* on there because it wanted to piss off Nintendo. Taito, however, put *Densha de Go!* on the WonderSwan for far more respectable reasons – it wants to piss you off.

It's worth noting that this game is a WonderSwan original – not WonderSwan Color, which brought colour to the many manga-based games on the system, or SwanCrystal, which helpfully made that colour not cause migraines.

One characteristic of all original WonderSwan games is that they have this lovely mud-filter laid over their black-and-white graphics, which proves to be especially endearing when you're desperately trying to play a rock-hard based-on-precision train simulator with a billion little instrument panels cluttering the handheld screen.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Monster Hunter	Capcom	PS2
2	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	GBA
3	Onimusha 3	Capcom	PS2
4	Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Xbox
5	One Piece: Baseball	Bandai	GBA
6	Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes	Konami	GC
7	Winning Eleven 7 International	Konami	PS2
8	Sengoku Musou	Koei	PS2
9	Pokémon Fire Red	Nintendo	GBA
10	Custom Robo	Nintendo	GC

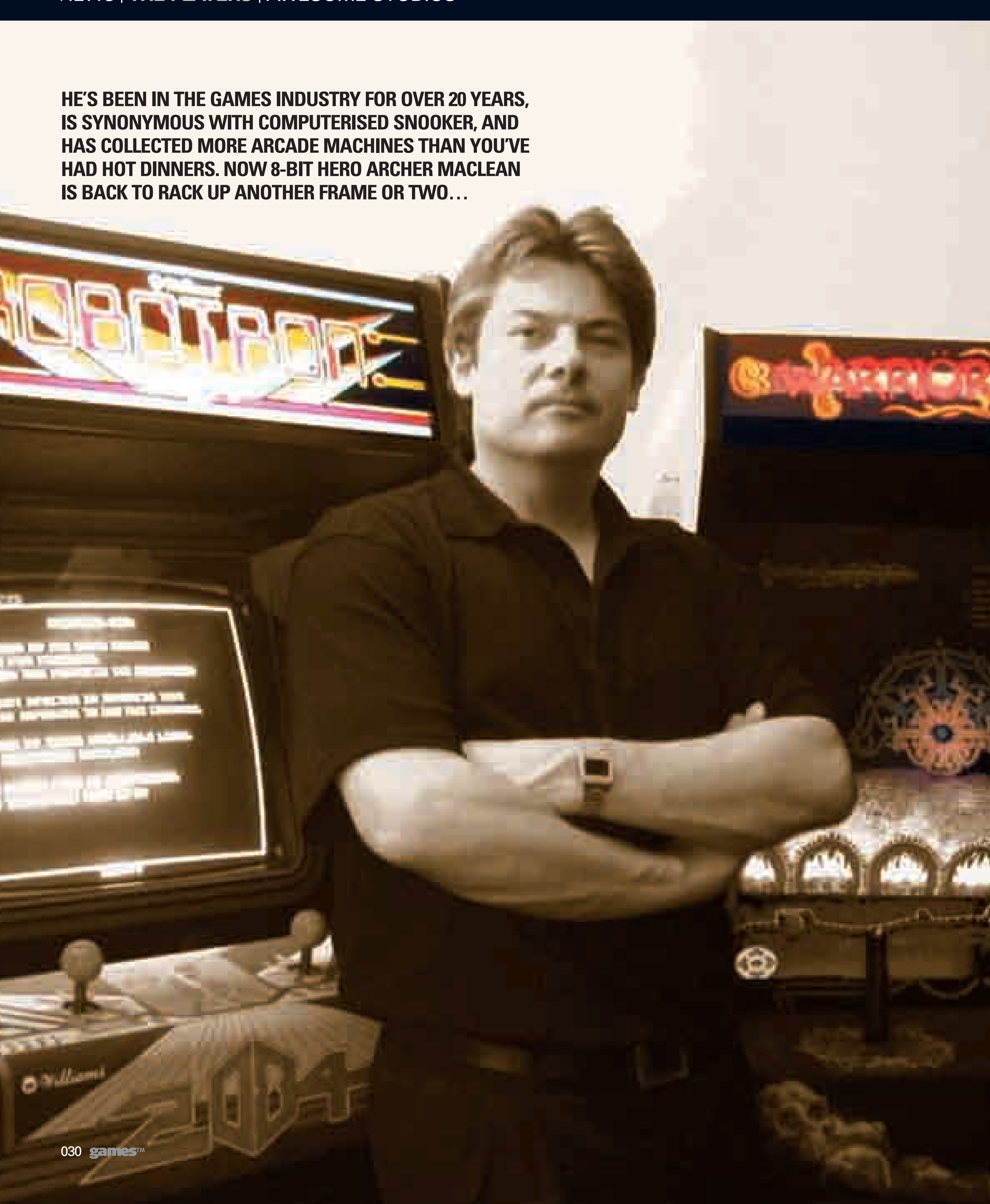
(Updated 14/3/04 © 2004 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



Monster Hunter

Onimusha 3

HE'S BEEN IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY FOR OVER 20 YEARS, IS SYNONYMOUS WITH COMPUTERISED SNOOKER, AND HAS COLLECTED MORE ARCADE MACHINES THAN YOU'VE HAD HOT DINNERS. NOW 8-BIT HERO ARCHER MACLEAN IS BACK TO RACK UP ANOTHER FRAME OR TWO…





"I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER DONE THE STATUS THING – I'VE ALWAYS WANTED MY QUALITY TO SPEAK FOR ITSELF"

ARCHER MACLEAN, AWESOME STUDIOS

AWESOME STUDIOS

ARCHER MACLEAN

When young Archer Maclean gingerly placed a shiny 10 pence coin in a new arcade game called *Space Invaders*, little did he realise how much it would change his life. Maclean had been creating electronic gadgets from a young age, but all this changed with the arrival of *Space Invaders*, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*. "I soon realised that you can come up with a piece of software and change it much more quickly than adapting a lump of electronics," explains Maclean, who was so smitten with arcade gaming that he's now amassed a collection of over 150 cabinets. "However, I also believed that I could write complete games as good as that on my own computers and, naturally, no-one believed it." Unperturbed, he began working on *Dropzone* for the Atari 800 in 1980 and had the last laugh when it became a huge hit for both the 800 and Commodore64 a few years later.

After becoming fixated with his Atari 800, Maclean entertained ambitions of working at Atari, but the firm's collapse caused him to rethink his plans. Despite this setback, he still has a deep fondness for the formative years of game development. "I miss the 'good ol days' because I was single-mindedly determined to achieve a good result and only had myself to blame if it wasn't up to scratch," Maclean reminisces. With this in mind, it's no surprise that he feels his best work has always been created when he was left to his own devices. "All the games in the past that I developed on my own and sold when finished were hugely more successful than the later ones where a publisher and their management structure buggered me around for the whole time they were 'financing' it," he confirms.

Although coding could be learned by just about anyone, there were no guarantees of a hit. "Very few people had the software skills or stamina to actually finish off all aspects of a complete machine-code game," Maclean explains. "We had virtually no software, graphics and sound 'tools' in those days – you had to write all that as well as the game. I guess the perfect analogy would be 'Everyone can draw to some extent, but it takes a lot more effort to produce a Rembrandt'."

Maclean's games are works of art, in a way, as he's always sought to make them as playable as possible. *IK+* and *Archer Maclean's Pool* were huge hits thanks to high anticipation among his fans. Even now, a new baize-based game from Maclean generates interest – though he's the first to admit that it can do more harm than good. "Right now, I seem to be labelled with being the bloke who created the snooker and pool genre, and sure enough they've gone on to sell a million copies, but look beneath the surface and there is a fair bit of diversity in there," he says. "Shortly, the world will see just how different my next titles are – and no, they have nothing to do with snooker. One's a sort of *Dropzone 2*, but it's a bit of a monumental Spielberg effort, and the other's top secret. A new *IK+++* is bubbling up too, so I'd wait for that, rather than buying some inferior version from someone claiming to own the heritage." Maclean is, of course, referring to his public spat with a certain developer over the rights to the classic *IK+*.

Now, Maclean now finds himself putting his development duties on hold in order to head Awesome Studios. Luckily, he's well aware of the pitfalls a developer can face; something he hopes Awesome Studios will avoid with its current publisher, Ignition Entertainment. "There are lots of reasons why there is so much crap out there today," he says, "with one being due to the publishers enslaving developers to a milestone schedule set in stone, then drip feeding them on sustenance pay. Publishers are typically run by accountants and managers who just don't understand the creative process and think that entire 18-month projects with 30 people can be planned to the nearest hour and brought in on time on a budget and still be brilliant."

Hopefully, Awesome Studios' first game, *Pool Paradise*, will keep the publishers happy – Maclean's been designing ball physics since 1980 so it should be good. But success is not something he worries about, and once *Pool Paradise* is out of the way you can be pretty sure he'll be happy to go back to playing on one of his arcade cabinets…

Pool Paradise is out now on PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube and PC.

THE INDUSTRY'S FINEST PREPARE TO DO BATTLE ONCE AGAIN FOR THE MOST COVETED PRIZE IN GAMING – A GAMES™ AWARD

games™ awards 2004

It doesn't seem like a whole year since we last gave out credit where it was due, but the time for such an event has swung round once more. Naturally, managing to come up with a whole host of voting categories (not to mention nominees within each one) has caused all manner of arguments among the **games™** team, but we're now quietly confident that the cream of the crop has been scooped off, ready for the tasting.

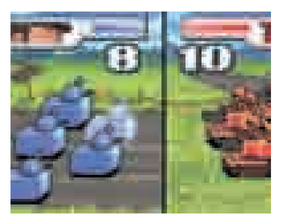
However, we're doing things a little differently this year. As readers, you now get the chance to vote on the six most important categories (namely, the best game of not only each format, but also of the past year) while the remaining winners will be decided by a select panel of industry judges. Once the votes are in, it'll be time for another huge awards ceremony, taking place this year in London – another night to remember.

But now on with the nominations…

GAME | OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY A]

THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE…

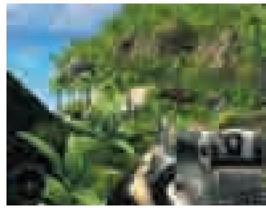
We've sifted through the deluge of great games that have appeared over the last 12 months and whittled them down to a shortlist of just ten. But which of these top titles will ultimately be crowned **games™** Game of the Year? That's where you come in…



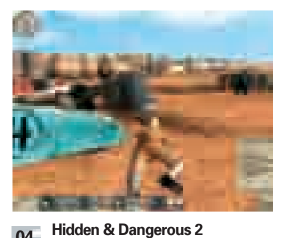
01 Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising [GBA]
The ingeniously quirky slant *Advance Wars* brought to strategy gaming came close to defining portable gameplay perfection, so it's no surprise the all-improved sequel stood out as one of the year's highlights.



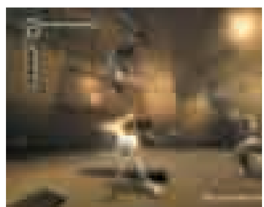
02 F-Zero GX [GameCube]
Bringing all the thrills of its breathtaking arcade counterpart to home consoles with aplomb, mind-blowing speeds are superbly balanced with compelling playability to deliver the most invigorating ride ever.



03 Far Cry [PC]
Debut titles don't come much more impressive than Crytek's *Far Cry*. Achingly gorgeous visuals, solid combat dynamics and frighteningly perceptive AI have already established the game as a true FPS great.



04 Hidden & Dangerous 2 [PC]
Mixing elements from the FPS, RTS and military squad-based genres, Illusion's masterpiece oozes quality in every department. Rarely will you see a game offer so much at such a consistently high standard.



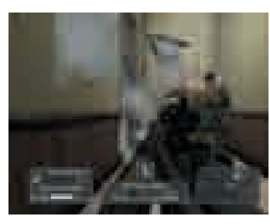
05 Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]
Reinventing the platform genre for the new generation, the Prince's stunning return has received nothing but praise from around the industry for its wonderfully polished execution and gameplay genius.



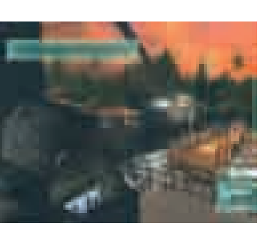
06 Pro Evolution Soccer 3 [PlayStation2]
A favourite with football fanatics and gameplay connoisseurs alike, no other soccer title has been able to challenge Konami's dominance on the pitch in terms of fluidity, authenticity and good old-fashioned fun.



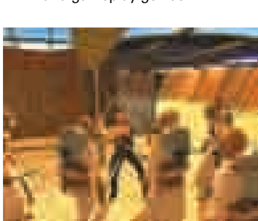
07 Project Gotham Racing 2 [Xbox]
Striking a perfect balance between authentic driving simulation and accessible high-speed action, is visually impressive masterpiece *PGR2* the definitive racing experience for both on- and offline gamers?



08 Rainbow Six 3 [Multiformat]
The finest outing for Tom Clancy's elite anti-terrorist unit to date, *R63*'s blend of solid FPS action and superbly intuitive squad control made tactical play accessible and gave the game instant online appeal.



09 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Multiformat]
In one of the year's biggest sequels, Sam Fisher was able to surpass his genre-defining first outing in style thanks to a lavish application of polish across the board and some fabulously innovative online play.



10 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic [Multi]
Hailed by many as the greatest *Star Wars* game ever created, *KOTOR* certainly offers players the most epic incarnation of the *Star Wars* universe in which to enjoy BioWare's inventive breed of RPG gameplay.

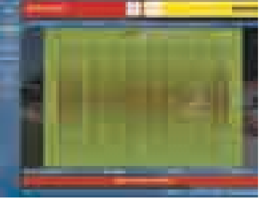
PC | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY B]

WHAT CLOCKED UP THE MOST CLICKS FOR YOU?

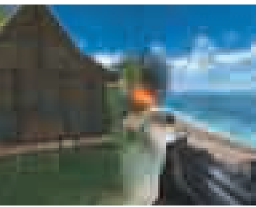
With PC technology advancing every day it can be a constant battle to keep your gaming machine at the cutting edge but, thanks to such impressive titles as these, it's been well worth keeping up with the pack.



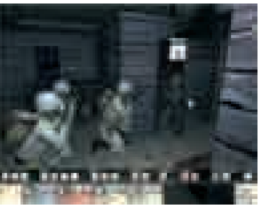
01 Call Of Duty
Taking the furious action and haunting atmosphere of the once great *Medal Of Honor* to a whole new level, *COD*'s stirring intensity and cinematic style was a leap forward for the all-action end of the genre.



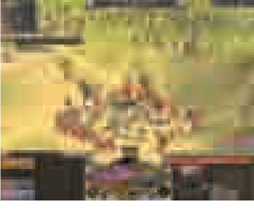
02 Championship Manager 03/04
Much more than just a seasonal update, *CM03/04* is the polished gem *CM4* should have been, with the once-mechanical 2D match engine being refined into a fluid spectacle of one-touch football and individual flair.



03 Far Cry
Far from being just a pretty face, Crytek's sublimely absorbing shooter breathes some much-needed vitality into the genre with its liberating non-linearity and the razor-sharp intelligence of your foes.



04 Hidden & Dangerous 2
Whether you're a scrupulous strategist or master marksman, *H&D2* was one of the year's must-have titles. The various interfaces offered a myriad of tactical possibilities for taking on the superb enemy AI.

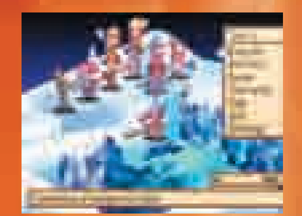


05 Rise Of Nations
Taking players on an epic journey of societal and military development through the ages, *RON* combines elements from *Sid Meier's Civilization* with impressively diverse RTS battles from every era of history.

PLAYSTATION2 | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY C]

BEST OF THE BEST-SELLER'S BEST

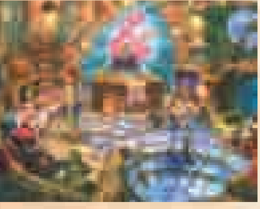
Sony's machine continues to enjoy a huge lead in the console race, and the portfolio of great games responsible for this dominance has only been strengthened over the last 12 months thanks to gems such as these…



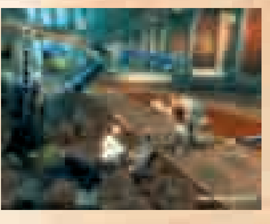
01 Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness
It's been quite a year for tactical RPGs, but while much has been made of the countless examples appearing on the GBA it was PS2 gem *Disgaea* that arguably stood out as the genre's finest ambassador.



02 EyeToy: Play
The EyeToy's contribution to the future of interactive gaming shouldn't be underestimated, and while *Play*'s digital parlour games are incredibly simple they're also among the year's most entertaining.



03 Final Fantasy X-2
The familiar *Final Fantasy* blueprint received yet another coat of polish and several welcome gameplay innovations to notch up another engrossing and visually sublime RPG adventure for the enduring series.



04 Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time
In resurrecting the classic series, Ubi placed much of its emphasis on reintroducing us to the forgotten art of great gameplay while showcasing presentation values of the highest standard.

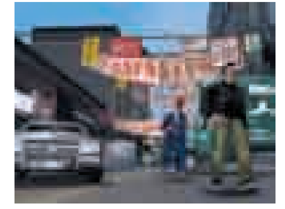


05 Pro Evolution Soccer 3
The king of the soccer sims was in world-beating form once again on its return to the PS2. The unparalleled gameplay dynamics were in better shape then ever, giving the action a superbly realistic feel.

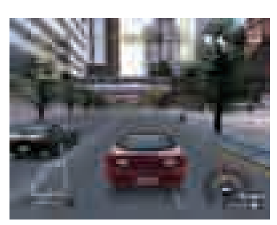
XBOX | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY D]

GIVING MICROSOFT'S BOX THE X-FACTOR

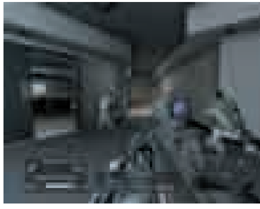
It's no doubt been a costly year for Xbox gamers thanks to the plethora of top titles your collection just wouldn't be complete without, but which of these big hitters was the undisputed pick of the bunch?



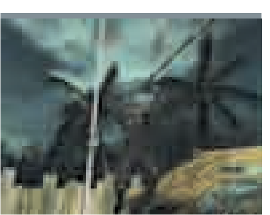
01 Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack
Okay, so the titles in question may be old news to the gaming world at large, but it cannot be denied that the *GTA* games are a huge asset to the console and should be high on every Xbox owner's must-have list.



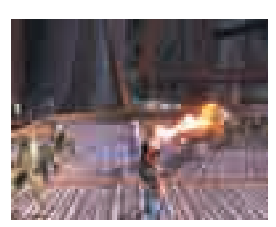
02 Project Gotham Racing 2
One of greatest racing titles ever made, Bizarre Creations' masterpiece offers a delightfully accessible slant on realistic vehicle handling that delivers some of the most satisfying racing on any system.



03 Rainbow Six 3
Tactical squad-based shooters don't come much better than this. The ability to quickly initiate strategic manoeuvres via headset or pad without any let-up in the action superbly tests both brawn and brain.



04 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
The welcome return of Sam Fisher showcased numerous refinements over the original game, introduced a series of innovative gameplay elements, and staged the action across a range of imaginative settings.



05 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic
Wonderfully accessible implementation of RPG conventions, an involving non-linear storyline and imaginative use of the *Star Wars* licence ensure the Force is strong here.

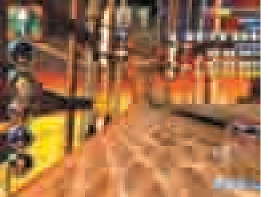
GAMECUBE | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY E]

PROVING IT'S STILL HIP TO BE SQUARE

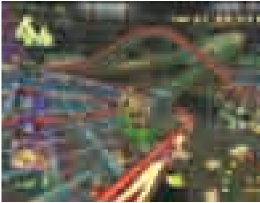
It's been a tough year for Nintendo's struggling Cube, but merely glancing at the enticing selection of big-name exclusives and superb multiformat conversions to arrive on the console over the last year you have to wonder why…



01 Beyond Good & Evil
Flying the flag for gameplay innovation, Ubi's highly original adventure defied categorisation with its unique elements being skilfully blended together in a way not dissimilar to that of the recent *Zelda* titles.



02 F-Zero GX
Another generation, another tremendous *F-Zero* title for Nintendo's home console. Harnessing the full extent of the Cube's processing power, could this become the series' most memorable incarnation yet?



03 Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
The plucky plumber and his gang made an emphatic dash to the rescue of Nintendo's struggling console with a fantastic *Mario Kart* title that superbly recaptured the inspired form of the 1992 original.



04 Soul Calibur II
Arguably the finest one-on-one fighting game of the year made a stunning transition to the Cube with accomplished visuals, fantastic gameplay and a surprisingly strong showing from bonus character Link.

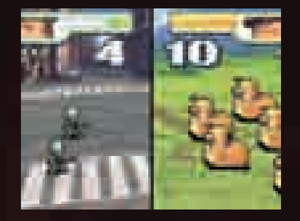


05 Viewtiful Joe
Capcom's stylish 2D side-scroller may be hard as nails at times, but it stands out as one of the year's heroes of originality with vibrant aesthetics, sublime animation and playability of the highest order.

GBA | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY F]

MINIATURE MASTERPIECES ON THE MOVE

Nintendo's handheld enjoyed another year of complete dominance in the field of portable gaming, and the calibre of last year's software releases have placed the console in a strong position for its impending battle with the PSP.



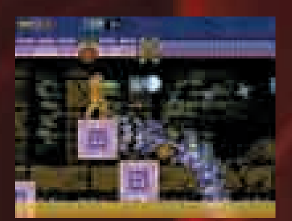
01 Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising
The cutesy *Advance Wars* armies continued to battle it out with the cream of the GBA must-have list, mounting a serious claim on the top spot with their tanks and their bombs and their bombs and their guns.



02 Fire Emblem
Another bout of epic warfare on Nintendo's pint-sized system from the *Advance Wars* stable, this time with much more of an RPG flavour. *Fire Emblem* added yet more irresistible strategy to the GBA's portfolio, as well as eating up much of our free time.



03 Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
Proving that two heads are always better than one, this inventive title showcased the best of both platform and RPG genres and demanded clever teamwork from the simultaneously controlled plumbing brothers.



04 Metroid: Zero Mission
A stunning update of the original NES *Metroid* game, *Zero Mission* sports fabulously detailed visuals and superbly wholesome gameplay that pushes the boundaries of the action genre on Nintendo's ubiquitous handheld.



05 Wario Ware, Inc: Mega Microgame$
As ingenious as it is bizarre, Nintendo's collection of diverse mini-games ranges from the unthinkably weird to bite-sized versions of Nintendo classics, resulting in a wonderfully unique gaming experience.

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

THE NOMINATIONS ARE IN, BUT WHICH ONES DO YOU THINK DESERVE VICTORY?

And that about wraps it up for the reader portion of the awards. You can vote in each of the six categories listed above, and then once we've collated all the entries the winners will be announced at our gala awards ceremony taking place in August. Registering your vote couldn't be simpler – all you need is access to a mobile phone and some nimble fingers… Look closely at the categories and nominations above and you'll see that each one has been allocated a letter and number respectively. To make your opinion heard, you simply have to use your mobile to text the word **GAMESTM** followed by the letter of the category, a space and then the number of the game. For example, if you wanted to vote for *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* as PlayStation2 game of the year, you'd send the message **GAMESTMC 05**. See? Couldn't be easier. Just key in your vote, then send it to **86025** and have your say…

(Text messages cost 25p per entry, plus standard network charges. Services provided by Greenland Interactive, NW1 0AP. Each vote must be sent separately.)



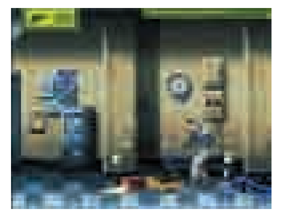
O₂ is the proud sponsor of the games™ 2004 awards, offering top quality games on your mobile phone. O₂ has a whole range of games that you can download to your phone, including first-person shoot-'em-ups, high-octane racers, action and sports challenges. The O₂ games arcade is updated monthly so there's always something new to try. All titles have high-quality colour graphics and sound effects, and now with *Cannons Tournament* up to four gamers can play each other simultaneously over the O₂ network.

O₂ games cost between £1.50 and £5 each to download and once you have one on your phone you can play it as many times as you want. If you want to test a game before you download it, check out the game emulator at www.o2.co.uk/games to see if you like it.

BEST | MOBILE PHONE GAME [SPONSORED BY O2]

WHICH MOBILE PHONE GAME REALLY RANG OUR BELL?

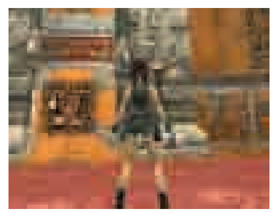
The N-Gage might not have enjoyed the success Nokia had predicted, but the platform led the way as mobile gaming was catapulted to new heights over the last year…



Splinter Cell
[N-Gage]
A faithful port of Sam Fisher's impressive GBA outing, the N-Gage adaptation managed to cleverly translate almost all of the gameplay elements from Ubi's definitive stealth title into a simplified 2D framework.



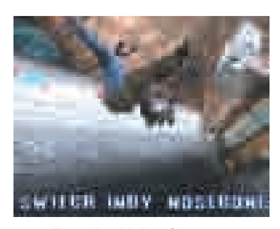
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time
[Java]
After successfully bringing the Prince's classic adventures to the mobile phone, Gameloft returned with another highly polished platform swashbuckler – this time a superb 2D adaptation of *Sands Of Time*.



Tomb Raider
[N-Gage]
The game that brought the N-Gage's visual capabilities to the attention of the world, *Tomb Raider* was an ambitious remake of the 1996 best-selling original that did a great job of emulating the PSone's power.



XIII
[Java]
The console versions of Ubi's comic-book shooter weren't without their faults, but the game made a very impressive transition to a traditional 2D side-scrolling blast-fest thanks to the talent at Gameloft.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater
[N-Gage]
Another PSone remake brought superbly to life by the N-Gage, *Pro Skater* gave all the kick-flipping joys of the original to gamers on the move and made full use of the wireless multiplayer capabilities.

BEST | USE OF LICENCE

NOT ALL LICENSED GAMES ARE DESTINED TO DISAPPOINT…

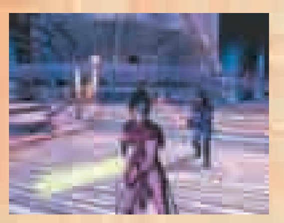
Enter The Matrix, Terminator 3, Bad Boys II… need we go on? Sadly, big-name endorsements are increasingly becoming synonymous with lazy implementation, but there have been some notable exceptions to the rule…



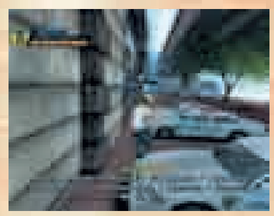
Rainbow Six 3
[Multiformat]
Tom Clancy's novels have given rise to some incredibly popular videogame franchises, with the adventures of elite anti-terrorist team Rainbow Six providing the inspiration for one of this year's finest titles.



SingStar
[PlayStation2]
Taking the interactive karaoke concept popularised by Konami up several octaves, Sony's offering has an impressive line-up of licensed tracks accompanied by the original videos in the background.



Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic [Multi]
BioWare emphatically succeeded where so many others have failed in the past by creating a game worthy of the illustrious *Star Wars* licence and delivering everything we'd hoped a Jedi-themed RPG could be.



Tony Hawk's Underground
[Multiformat]
One series that actually delivers the level of quality implied by its namesake is the *Tony Hawk* franchise, with *Underground* continuing to exemplify the genre in the same way its patron once dominated the sport.



TRON 2.0
[PC]
While an updated version of the *TRON* universe didn't sound like the ideal FPS setting, an inspired artistic revamp and several inventive gameplay elements saw the licence employed to phenomenal effect.

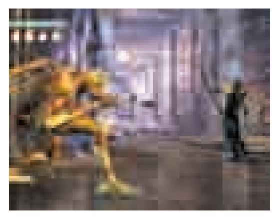
BEST | COMEBACK

CLASSIC TITLES BROUGHT BACK FROM THE GRAVE IN STYLE

More and more of our favourite titles from yesteryear are being signed up to undergo modern-day revamps, and there are plenty of success stories to show that these classics can indeed be lovingly restored to their former glory.



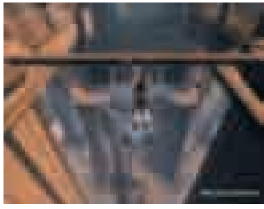
F-Zero GX
[GameCube]
The original futuristic racer made an emphatic return to the helm of the genre courtesy of Amusement Vision. Magnificently reworked for the new generation, *GX* upholds the principles of its ancestry in style.



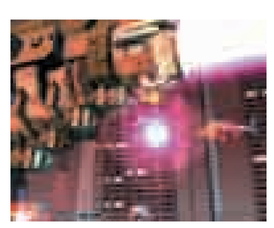
Ninja Gaiden
[Xbox]
The long-awaited resurrection of the excellent *Ninja Gaiden* series was clearly a labour of love for Team Ninja, which has lavished a huge amount of polish on both the gratifying combat and lush visuals.



Out Run 2
[Arcade]
Everyone's favourite Eighties arcade racer finally received a sequel some 17 years down the track, which managed to retain the original's superbly accessible appeal but with a dazzling 21st Century paint job.



Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]
Jordan Mechner's classic 2D platform series helped define a genre back in its day and Ubi's 3D revamp proved to be no less influential, sticking firmly to its traditions of exquisite gameplay and polished animation.



R-Type Final
[PlayStation2]
A swansong for the timeless shoot-'em-up series, *R-Type Final* placed over a hundred different ships at your disposal and pitted you against the Bydo Empire for the final time in a stylish old-school blast fest.

BEST | OFFLINE MULTIPLAYER

WHO NEEDS BROADBAND WHEN YOU'VE GOT REAL FRIENDS?

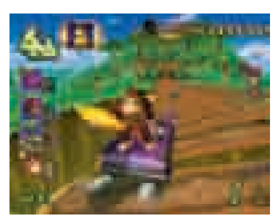
With broadband fever engulfing the nation, are the days of huddling around one console over? Not if these social gaming gems have anything to do with it, but which is the biggest reason for getting your mates round?



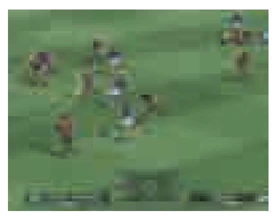
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising [GBA]
Whether via the wonders of the link cable or taking turns with a single machine, waging war against up to three friends with your miniature militia is one of the most addictive concepts in handheld gaming.



Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II [Multiformat]
Black Isle's fabulously engrossing action RPG is twice the fun when you've got a companion to share your adventures with, providing your party with some helpful back-up on the perilous battlefields.



Mario Kart: Double Dash!! [GameCube]
Brimming with entertainment in single-player mode, *Double Dash!!* goes into overdrive when you throw a couple of mates into the equation. You'll be merrily harking back to the glory days of the SNES in no time…



Pro Evolution Soccer 3 [PlayStation2]
The only way to experience the world's greatest football game in all its glory, multiplayer matches become increasingly compelling with every encounter and fully showcase this game's unrivalled playability.



Top Spin [Xbox]
PAM's exquisite tennis sim superbly balances instant accessibility with an incredible depth of mastery, making for equally thrilling four-player action whether you're a beginner or a pro.

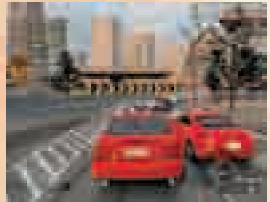
BEST | ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

WHAT'S THE SINGLE BIGGEST REASON FOR GETTING ONLINE?

This year saw a boom in online console gaming as thousands of Xbox and PS2 owners joined the legions of PC gamers already taking on the world, but which platform played host to the year's finest online experience?



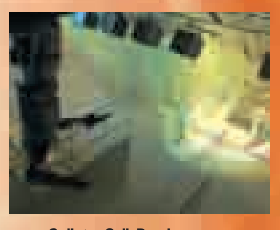
Battlefield Vietnam [PC]
With *Battlefield 1942* still among the most compulsively playable online titles of all time, how could the all-improved *BV* fail to succeed with the added potential of its rich new settings and tantalising vehicle types?



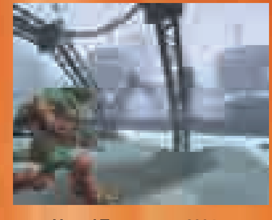
Project Gotham Racing 2 [Xbox]
Arguably Xbox Live's most prized asset, the online component of Bizarre Creations' exquisitely tuned racer is unrivalled on any platform for multiplayer action that's as high on thrills as it is on skills.



Rainbow Six 3 [Multiformat]
The solid combat engine and cleverly designed maps make *R63* a strong contender for traditional online blasting, but it's the superb squad-based co-operative play that really sets this apart from the crowd.



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Multiformat]
Rather than settling for the standard online modes you'd expect from a *Tom Clancy* title, Ubi has devised a fabulously innovative game that superbly employs the skilful stealth play for which the series is renowned.



Unreal Tournament 2004 [PC]
The introduction of vehicle play gives rise to some of the most riveting battles ever to grace the series' superbly designed arenas, while sticking firmly to the irresistible all-action flavour of the *UT* legacy.

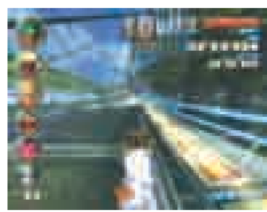
BEST | VISUALS

PUSHING THOSE PIXELS AND POLYGONS HARDER THAN EVER

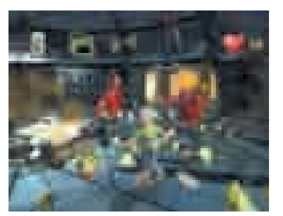
Beauty may only be skin deep – especially in gaming where eye-candy has notoriously been used as a front for shoddy gameplay – but more often than not, polished visuals remain the cornerstone of a great game experience.



Far Cry [PC]
After originating as a technical demo for Nvidia graphics cards, it's no surprise that *Far Cry* became one of the year's most visually outstanding titles with its incredible draw distances and gloriously rich textures.



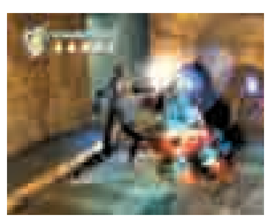
F-Zero GX [GameCube]
In maintaining such strikingly crisp visuals and a consistent frame rate at blistering speeds, *F-Zero GX* is both an astounding technical achievement and one of the most aesthetically appealing Cube titles around.



Grabbed By The Ghoulies [Xbox]
Rare's quirky action adventure may have failed to sparkle in terms of gameplay, but by harnessing the full graphical capabilities of the Xbox so vibrantly it gave us one of the year's most stylish games.



Max Payne [GBA]
Mobius worked little short of a technological miracle in bringing all the joys of Bullet Time to Nintendo's handheld machine, delivering gameplay and 3D visuals unlike anything the GBA has been able to handle before.

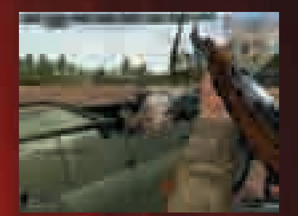


Ninja Gaiden [Xbox]
Along with its impressive gameplay, *Ninja Gaiden* didn't disappoint in the visuals department. Solidly polished throughout, the game has some of the best bosses and FMV sequences on any console.

BEST | SOUND

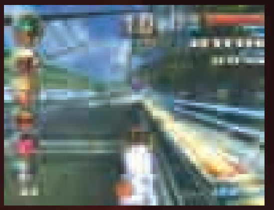
PUTTING THE ICING ON THE CAKE OF A GREAT GAME

Not content with supplying us with mere background noise, these titles made us sit up and listen from the start with their exquisite soundtracks, but which had us cranking up the volume to the max?

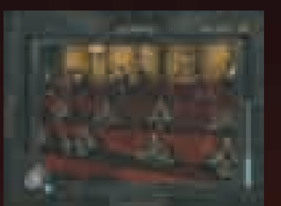




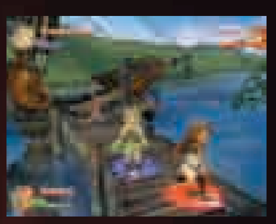
Battlefield Vietnam
[PC]
A playlist featuring classic tracks from The Kinks, The Troggs and Jefferson Airplane gives *BV* one of the most rousing musical scores in gaming, not to mention the vivid effects bringing the battlefield to life.



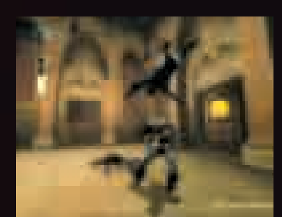
F-Zero GX
[GameCube]
With striking effects that so vibrantly complement the eye-popping speeds and a musical score featuring inspired updates of tunes from the original game, *GX*'s uplifting audio experience takes some beating.



Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly
[PlayStation2]
Atmosphere is everything in Tecmo's psychological horror series, and the haunting effects throughout *Crimson Butterfly* never disappoint in lacing the air with tension and building to some terrifying crescendos.



Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles
[GameCube]
With a title track to die for and divine music adorning every last inch of the game, the *Crystal Chronicles* soundtrack injects a fabulously cheery mood into proceedings that lifts the whole experience superbly.

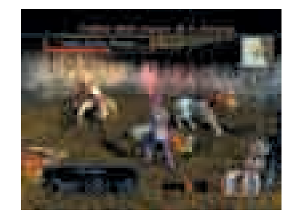


Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]
Rounding off one of the most thoroughly polished titles of the year, *The Sands Of Time* certainly didn't let the side down when it came to sound with its crisp effects and wonderful atmosphere generation.

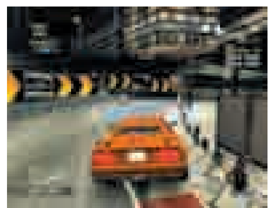
BEST | DEVELOPER

CELEBRATING THE BRAINS BEHIND THE OPERATION

Burning the candle at both ends to bring us bigger and better gaming experiences, here's the pick of those unsung heroes whose vision, talent and hard work is responsible for driving the industry forward.



BioWare
The talented Canadian developer brought the *Star Wars* universe to life superbly with *Knights Of The Old Republic*, innovating with RPG conventions and laying strong foundations for its next project, *Jade Empire*.



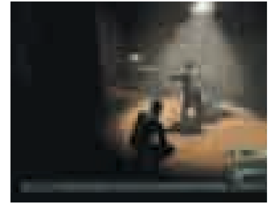
Bizarre Creations
With *Project Gotham Racing 2*, Liverpool-based studio Bizarre Creations gave us the finest driving game of the year and cemented its name in the history books as one of the genre's all-time great developers.



Intelligent Systems
Dominating the handheld market this year with magnificent strategy epics *Advance Wars 2* and *Fire Emblem*, Intelligent Systems has exemplified how the limited power of the GBA can be fully harnessed.



Ion Storm
In weaving the rich fabric of the *Deus Ex: Invisible War* game world, with its mind-boggling web of possible routes and cutting edge visual effects, Ion Storm produced some of the year's most impressive work.

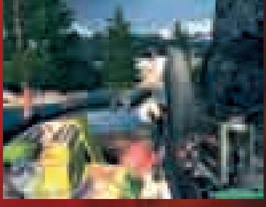


Ubisoft
Most of Ubisoft's in-house titles have involved collaboration between its worldwide network of studios, with the likes of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* employing the talents of the Paris, Montreal and Shanghai teams.

BEST | PUBLISHER

WHOSE PORTFOLIO BOASTED AN ALL-STAR CAST?

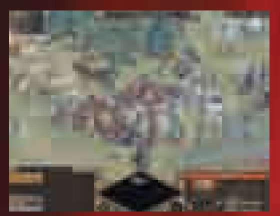
We've rounded up the publishing houses responsible for bringing us the year's finest titles, but who's combined collection accounted for the greatest number of this year's golden gaming moments?



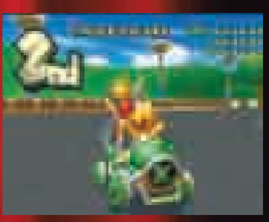
Activision
Activision has enjoyed a hugely successful year with the likes of *THUG, Call Of Duty* and *Knights Of The Old Republic*, and with *Rome: Total War* and *The Movies* on the horizon the future looks very bright indeed.



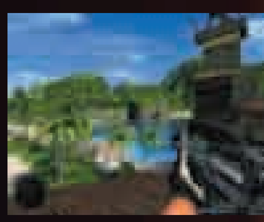
Electronic Arts
EA has completely dominated the charts over the past year with its portfolio of prestigious franchises, and the trend looks set to continue after snapping up the rights to the *TimeSplitters* and *Burnout* games.



Microsoft
Thanks to such tremendous titles as *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Rise Of Nations* it's been a great year for Microsoft, and with the likes of *Halo 2* on the way next year could be even better.



Nintendo
As well as bringing us an impressive proportion of the finest titles to hit the GBA over the last year, Nintendo was also responsible for the return of flagship franchises *Mario Kart* and *F-Zero* on the Cube.



Ubisoft
With the likes of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, *Far Cry* and *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* among its portfolio of outstanding titles, Ubi has given us some of the year's most impressive games.

RELEASE LISTS



Killer 7 Multi Art direction over polygon count is a major gamble. Will it pay off for Capcom?

Ninja Gaiden Xbox We check out Ryu on page 96

Harvest Moon Cube As far as Ubisoft is concerned, it most certainly is a wonderful life



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Ubisoft

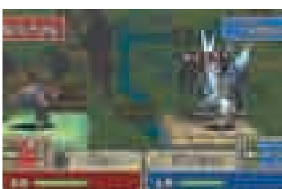
Online or off, we simply can't get enough of Sam Fisher's sneaky ways. The quintessential stealth title, *Pandora Tomorrow* has raised standards within the genre and left Solid Snake with a lot to prove. We've even bought our own night-vision goggles – you know, just in case…



FIRE EMBLEM

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

All hail the king of strategy, the GBA. Whether it's *Advance Wars, Tactics Ogre* or *FFTA*, you can guarantee that at least one handheld in the office is set to thinking mode. Current flavour of the month is the latest instalment in the *Fire Emblem* series. However long we play, the action just keeps coming.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Ubisoft

It's amazing what a difference a few pounds can make. Since the wise decision to drop the price of both *Prince Of Persia* and Michel Ancel's quirky adventure for their multiformat releases, the two games have been selling like proverbial hot cakes. Just like they deserved to from day one, really. When will people learn, eh?





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '04			
30 April	Fight Night 2004	EA	
30 April	Riding Spirits 2	Capcom	
30 April	Knights Of The Temple: Infernal Crusade	TDK	
30April	Champions of Norrath	Ubisoft	
30 April	Project Zero 2	Ubisoft	
30 April	Conan	TDK	
30 April	Way Of The Samurai 2	Capcom	
30 April	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	
TBC	McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami	
TBC	Malice	Evolved	
TBC	Powerdrome	Evolved	
MAY '04			
07 May	Cy Girls	Konami	
07 May	Legends Of Wrestling Showdown	Acclaim	
07 May	Euro 2004	EA	
14 May	Van Helsing	Vivendi	
14 May	The Suffering	Midway	
21 May	SingStar	Sony	
28 May	Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Koei	Wanted
28 May	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	EA	
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami	
TBC	MTV Music Generator 3	Codemasters	
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	England International Football	Codemasters	
JUNE '04			
01 June	Driv3r	Atari	
25 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Transformers	Atari	
TBC	Mashed	Empire	
TBC	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony	
TBC	The Fast And The Furious	Vivendi	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	Sony	
TBC	Shellshock: 'Nam 67	Eidos	
Q2 '04			
TBC	Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	
TBC	Drakengard	TBC	
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
TBC	Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari	
TBC	Psi-Ops	Midway	
TBC	Perfect Ace 2	Oxygen	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Onimusha 3	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Onimusha Blade Warriors	Capcom	
TBC	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
TBC	Athens 2004	Sony	

GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '04			
30 April	Fight Night 2004	EA	
TBC	Pokémon Channel	Nintendo	
TBC	Conan	TDK	
TBC	Knights Of The Temple: Infernal Crusade	TDK	
MAY '04			
07 May	Euro 2004	EA	
28 May	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	EA	
TBC	Phantasy Star Online 3: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
TBC	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	Wanted
JUNE '04			
18 June	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	
Q2 '04			
TBC	Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	Wanted
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	
TBC	Wario Ware Inc. Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Paper Mario	Nintendo	
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari	
TBC	Donkey Konga	Nintendo	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
APRIL '04		
23 April	TOCA Race Driver 2 The Ultimate Racing Simulator	Codemasters
23 April	Manhunt	Rockstar
30 April	Fight Night 2004	EA
30 April	Conan	TDK
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar
TBC	Hitman Contracts	Eidos
TBC	Malice	Evolved
TBC	Powerdrome	Evolved

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2 Page 48 hides more details…

Painkiller PC *Doom, Serious Sam* and now this – has People Can Fly perfected the all-action no-brainer?

Thief: Deadly Shadows Multi It may still be skulking but we've seen it…

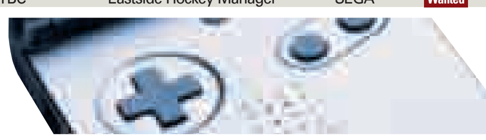
Hitman: Contracts Multi Agent 47 returns to dish out 29 times the pain

MAY '04			
07 May	Legends Of Wrestling Showdown	Acclaim	
07 May	Euro 2004	EA	
14 May	Van Helsing	Vivendi	
14 May	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	
14 May	The Suffering	Midway	
28 May	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	EA	
TBC	Obscure	Microïds	
TBC	England International Football	Codemasters	
TBC	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	SCi	
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	MTV Music Generator 3	Codemasters	
JUNE '04			
01 June	Driv3r	Atari	
24 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
TBC	The Fast And The Furious	Vivendi	
TBC	Shadow Ops	Atari	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Shellshock: 'Nam 67	Eidos	
Q2 '04			
TBC	Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	
TBC	Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Conker Live And Uncut	Microsoft	
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Psi-Ops	Midway	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	
TBC	Headhunter Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher
APRIL '04		
23 April	TOCA Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator	Codemasters
30 April	Fight Night 2004	EA
30 April	Alias	Acclaim
30 April	Hitman Contracts	Eidos
30 April	World Championship Rugby	Acclaim
30 April	Soldner: Secret Of Wars	JoWood
MAY '04		
07 May	Euro 2004	EA
07 May	Legends Of Wrestling Showdown	Acclaim
14 May	True Crime: Streets Of LA	Activision
28 May	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	EA
TBC	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	SCi
TBC	Obscure	Microïds
JUNE '04		
01 June	Driv3r	Atari
18 June	Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	Vivendi
25 June	Shrek 2	Activision
TBC	Shadow Ops	Atari
TBC	EverQuest II	Ubisoft
Q2 '04		
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi
TBC	Black 9	Majesco
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA
TBC	Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos Wanted
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA
TBC	Bard's Tale	Acclaim
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco
TBC	Eastside Hockey Manager	SEGA Wanted



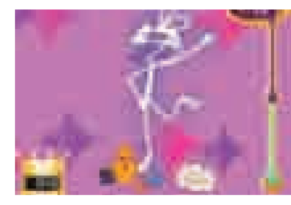
GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '04			
30 April	Barbarian	Titus	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2004	Konami	
MAY '04			
28 May	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	EA	
TBC	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	
JUNE '04			
25 June	Spyro Fusion	Vivendi	
25 June	Crash Fusion	Vivendi	
25 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
TBC	Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	
Q2 '04			
TBC	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	
TBC	Donkey Kong Country 2	Nintendo	
TBC	CT Special Forces 3	LSP	
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	Sonic Advance 3	THQ	
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Hamtaro: Rainbow Rescue	Nintendo	
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Wanted

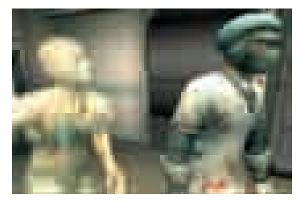
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, mind. We just print what we're told. Don't shoot the messenger…

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

VIB RIPPLE
Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: SCEJ
Fans of Vibri and his crazy literal take on line dancing may still be waiting to hear whether or not *Mojib Ribon* will be translated, but in the East the masses are waiting for this next quirky title. Finding hidden items in pictures from your linked-up camera seems to be the principal concept. Yes, we're confused too.



SECOND SIGHT
Format: Multiformat
Publisher: TBC
It'll be interesting to see where the coming months take Free Radical's latest project – anything less than a major publisher would be criminal. With the style of *TimeSplitters* and bursting with more original ideas than we've space to list, this could definitely be a major sleeper hit this year.



DRAKENGARD
Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: TBC
Known as *Drag-On Dragoon* in Japan, Square Enix's dragon-fuelled adventure is more and more likely to get a PAL release with every one of the developer's quirky titles that finds its way onto our shelves. Mixed reviews and *Dynasty Warriors* comparisons don't fill us with hope, but we'll wait until we can form our own opinions.



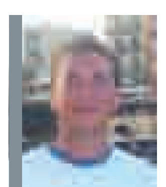
FROM THE FRONT

MIXED FORTUNES FOR BRITISH COMPANIES THIS MONTH, WHILE SONY DOMINATES THE HARDWARE NEWS



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR



I was 19 years old and had spent my time working from the age of 11 cooking meals, collecting golf balls on golf ranges, being a pool attendant, making sandwiches and manning reception desks. But nothing would ever top the day I arrived at GT Interactive's front door in Marylebone with a CV in my little bag asking for a job as a receptionist. I had a real passion for games and this was the company that published *Doom*, *Quake* and *Mortal Kombat*. I got the job – I was so happy! What I really wanted to do, though, was PR. Why? The great thing about PR is having great relationships and a beer with decent people, having a passion about the products you deal with, and seeing fantastic press results because of your hard work and careful planning.

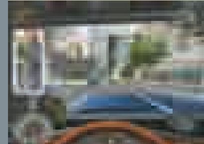
My first job was as a PR assistant. I spent much of my time talking to regional press, dealing with website requests for new products, sending out release schedules and playing a supporting role at events. I loved my job and worked bloody hard. After a while, my position changed from PR assistant to PR executive, to PR manager, to head of communications, to head of UK PR. Eventually you get what you want when you work hard for it. You also get to travel the world, work with great products, earn money, get free games and be creative.

Getting into the industry isn't as hard as you think but, like any other job, you need to get your foot in the door and the main thing is to be enthusiastic. So all you fun-loving, hard-working film and game lovers should start getting your CV together and start applying to publishers and agencies as I once did, because one day you could be doing exactly what you always wanted.

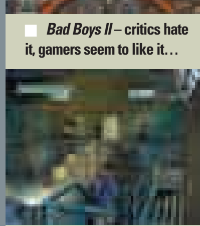
Lee Kirton
Head Of UK PR, Atari



Big Mutha Truckers was a hit for Empire.



Bad Boys II – critics hate it, gamers seem to like it…



EMPIRE'S ON THE UP, BUT ARGONAUT TAKES A TUMBLE

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

As British developers and publishers struggle to stay afloat in an increasingly competitive market, it's nice to see the likes of Empire Interactive gradually starting to turn a profit. The North Finchley-based publisher has announced revenues of £30.4 million thanks to the success of several key titles.

"We are very pleased with the progress the group has made during the current year," said Empire's chief executive, Ian Higgins. "The success of products such as *Starsky & Hutch* and *Big Mutha Truckers* creates franchises for the group which helps build value for future titles." Empire's revenues are now up an impressive 35 per cent on last year and its profit for this year has been £600,000. While this may not sound too impressive compared to amounts brought in by the likes of Take 2 and EA, it's a huge improvement on the £2.9 million loss that was recorded last year.

While Empire is turning its fortunes around, the same cannot be said for Argonaut. Despite having three titles ready for Christmas, the interim results for the six months prior to the end of January have shown a greater loss than the previous financial year. Argonaut revealed a total pre-tax loss of £2.4 million on a turnover of £4.4

"THE SUCCESS OF PRODUCTS SUCH AS STARSKY & HUTCH CREATES FRANCHISES WHICH BUILDS VALUE FOR FUTURE TITLES"

Link all your Sony toys together. If you like.

PSP TO LINK TO SONY PRODUCTS

SONY REVEALS CONNECTIVITY FOR THE PSP

Despite Nintendo's current batch of GameCube-to-GBA connectivity games being mostly underwhelming, Sony Japan's president, Fumiya Takeno, has revealed we can expect similar things from the PSP.

In a recent interview with Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun*, Takeno-san came out with the following cryptic message: "If a human being wants to play, then he'll create some way of playing, whether it be cards or whatever. Since the PS2 and PSP will also link together, it could change the way games are planned out. You could have a PS2 in your room, a PSX in the living room and a PSP for outdoors, and one game could fuse all these platforms together and alter itself for each location."

It's certainly intriguing, but after witnessing how many games actually make decent use of Nintendo's device, we can't help feel a little wary about Sony's latest revelation. One of the biggest problems that Sony will face is convincing third-party developers to use the device in innovative ways and not simply using it as a throwaway gadget in order to increase sales



Argonaut hopes new titles will boost its fortunes.

Starsky & Hutch is now the first game in a series – expect the next instalment in autumn.

million, which is a far cry from the £1.1 million loss of last year against an even greater turnover of £6.9 million.

But things are starting to look up for Argonaut thanks to a potentially huge franchise deal with EA and the long-awaited releases of several projects. *Carve, Powerdrome* and *Malice* should all hit the shelves by the end of this month and *Catwoman* marks yet another collaboration with EA (*Harry Potter* is still a strong seller on the PSone). We've lost count of the number of British developers and publishers that have disappeared over the past year. Here's hoping that we don't have to add Empire and Argonaut to an ever-growing list…

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	007: Everything Or Nothing	EA Games	Multi
2	LMA Manager 2004	Codemasters	PS2
3	Battlefield: Vietnam	EA Games	PC
4	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	Multi
5	Norton Internet Security 2004	Norton	PC
6	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	PC
7	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	Multi
8	Cricket 2004	EA Games	Multi
9	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Multi
10	SOCOM II: Navy Seals	SCEE	PS2

So, not much change at the top – *EON* remains chart champion, but with so many FPS games out on the same day it's not surprising that they didn't do better. *UT2004* couldn't even beat *Norton Internet Security 2004*…



007: Everything Or Nothing

Battlefield: Vietnam

Norton Internet Security 2004

SONY'S PSX FINALLY GETS CONFIRMED FOR UK

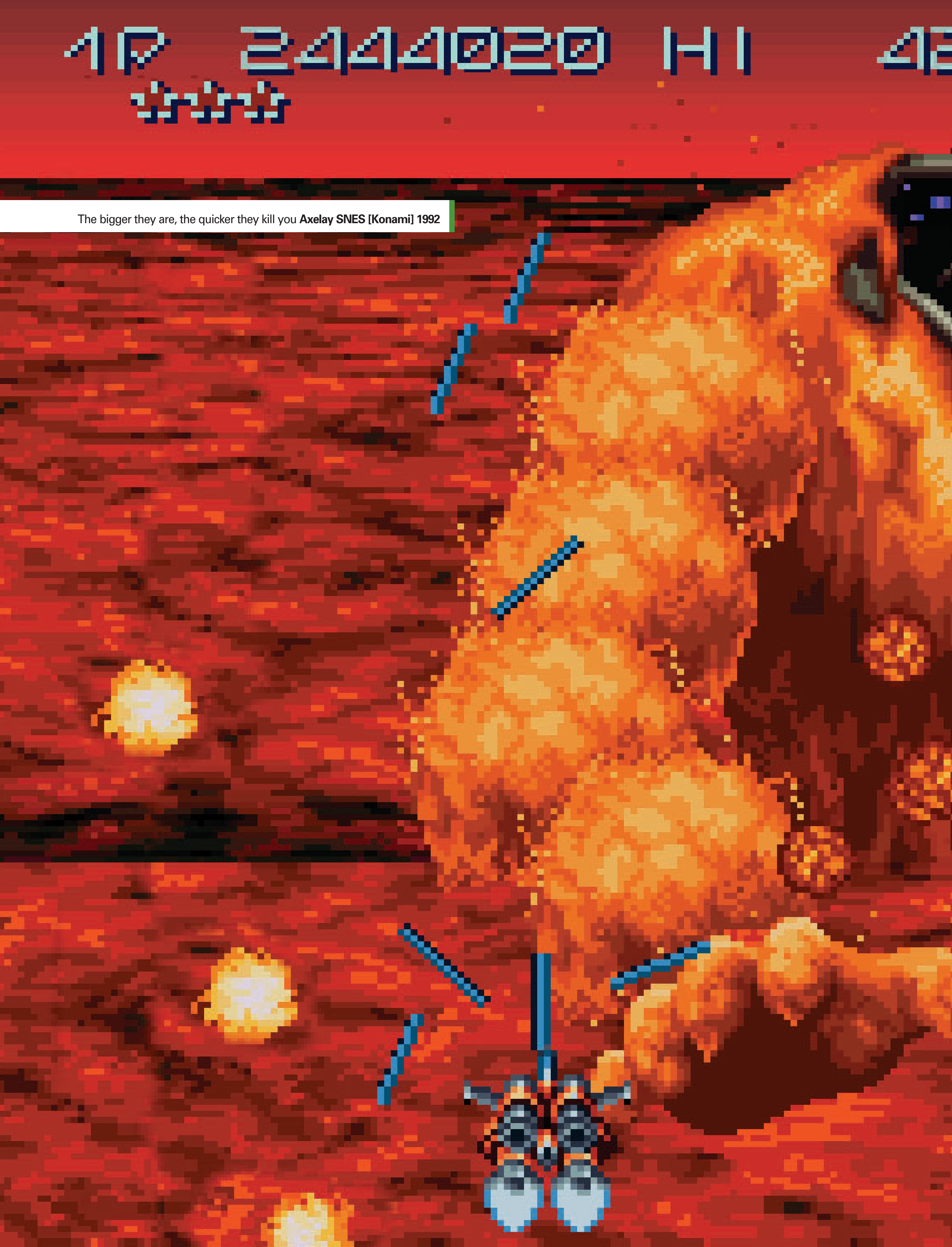
WHY ARE WE WAITING?

While Sony has been reluctant to reveal an exact release date for the PSX and has offered little more than a "no comment", we're expecting the PSX to be out in Europe by the end of 2004. Sony's multi-functional system caused controversy in Japan when it was released before Christmas without many of its key features. An upgrade was eventually put out and it's this version of the machine that we're expecting to see in Europe.

As many will know, the PSX is Sony's attempt to break into the more expansive home-entertainment market and is basically a glorified PlayStation2 with the ability to record DVDs, play MP3s, and store and sort digital pictures. Of course, the most important thing gamers will want to know is the PSX's price, but again Sony is remaining extremely tight-lipped.

However, considering it will be launched as a home-entertainment system and not a console, we're expecting it to cost around £400 to £500. It's well known that the PSX is occupying an area that Microsoft is already interested in so the American giant will watch the launch with interest.

You could have one of these in your house by the end of the year. Lovely.



The bigger they are, the quicker they kill you **Axelay SNES [Konami] 1992**


2057300

THE MATRIX ONLINE



> "THE MATRIX ONLINE IS THE PERFECT PROPERTY TO SHOWCASE WARNER BROS. STUDIOS' INCREASING INVOLVEMENT IN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT"
> *KEVIN TSUJIHARA, EXECUTIVE VP, WARNER BROS ENTERTAINMENT*

■ The Agents are still a big problem inside The Matrix and, as we all know, everyone who has fought an Agent has died…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"WHY, OH WHY DIDN'T I TAKE THE BLUE PILL?"

MMORPG - ORCS x THE MATRIX = MATRIX ONLINE

■ You might have the moves, but anyone thinking that they'll get to be The One should put those thoughts out of their head right now; there is only one, after all.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in October 1994, Monolith Productions has gone from being a newcomer with interests in developing and publishing to being exclusively concerned with independent development for a wide variety of partners. In February 2002, the company set up LithTech Inc, a technology subsidiary focused on the creation of advanced 3D development systems.

HISTORY

- **CONTRACT JACK** 2003 [PC]
- **TRON 2.0** 2003 [PC]
- **NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER 2** 2002 [PC]

WHO NEEDS THE ONE WHEN YOU CAN HAVE MILLIONS?

So, we've sat through all three movies, bought the anime DVD, listened to the soundtrack, worn the sunglasses and even tried our hand at a few of the moves (albeit at the cost of our physical wellbeing) – but what exactly is The Matrix? Yes, we know that 'no-one can be told what The Matrix is', but before you try to quote us expansive blocks from the script, you might want to stop and think about it. Millions of people, all locked away in a darkened place, linked to a central computer that creates a fantasy world for them to live in… just toss in a few goblin hordes and that sounds a whole lot like a massively multiplayer online RPG to us.

Of course, up to now the videogames world has taken a rather different approach to the *Matrix* licence. Shunning a cerebral approach for the more smash-mouth 'let's have loads of action going on all at once' that Atari seems to favour at the moment, the only offering we've seen (Shiny's *Enter The Matrix*) left us cold after its sacrifice of substance in the name of style. Thankfully, it looks as though the next game to take up the *Matrix* gauntlet might actually be able to do it some justice, by taking the most obvious route possible and being an MMORPG. Makes you wonder why no-one thought of it in the first place…

"MANY OF THE IDEAS SOUND IMPRESSIVE, THOUGH IT'S NOT KNOWN HOW WELL THEY WILL WORK TOGETHER"

Developed by Seattle-based Monolith Productions (the talent behind successful movie tie-ins like *TRON 2.0* and *Alien Vs Predator*), *The Matrix Online* picks up the pieces left behind by the disappointing conclusion of the movie trilogy and attempts to turn them into a hugely successful MMORPG – and it's a task that could well be within its grasp. Despite being set after the trilogy, the game looks to be taking the concept of the Matrix back to the roots of the original film, due to the removal of the more overly fantastical elements that seemed out of place even in a fantasy sci-fi context.

What's more, Monolith's attempts to create a sprawling urban environment packed with enough essence of the licence without losing traditional MMORPG values could be enough to tip the balance in its favour. It's these tried-and-tested values that should help *The Matrix Online* become so much more than just a brain-numbing brawl-'em-up on wires. Granted, combat is a huge part of the game but thanks to the title's premise, there's enough scope for character development and a deeper game experience than just learning kung-fu.

Set against the backdrop of an uneasy truce between Zion and the Machines, how you go about developing your character is as important as in any MMORPG. While you might be playing the part of a recent escapee of the Matrix, that doesn't necessarily mean your loyalty should lie with the humans. The game's main mission structure promises to encompass every eventuality, with tasks being offered by Zion, the Machines and other organisations (no doubt the Merovingian will rear his ugly head again) so making the decision of who to get involved with isn't quite as obvious as you might think. As you enhance your character and get more recognition among your fellow escapees, you'll be able to form groups (for completing certain tougher missions), lead your own Hovercraft crew and even create your own political faction if becoming the next Morpheus takes your fancy.

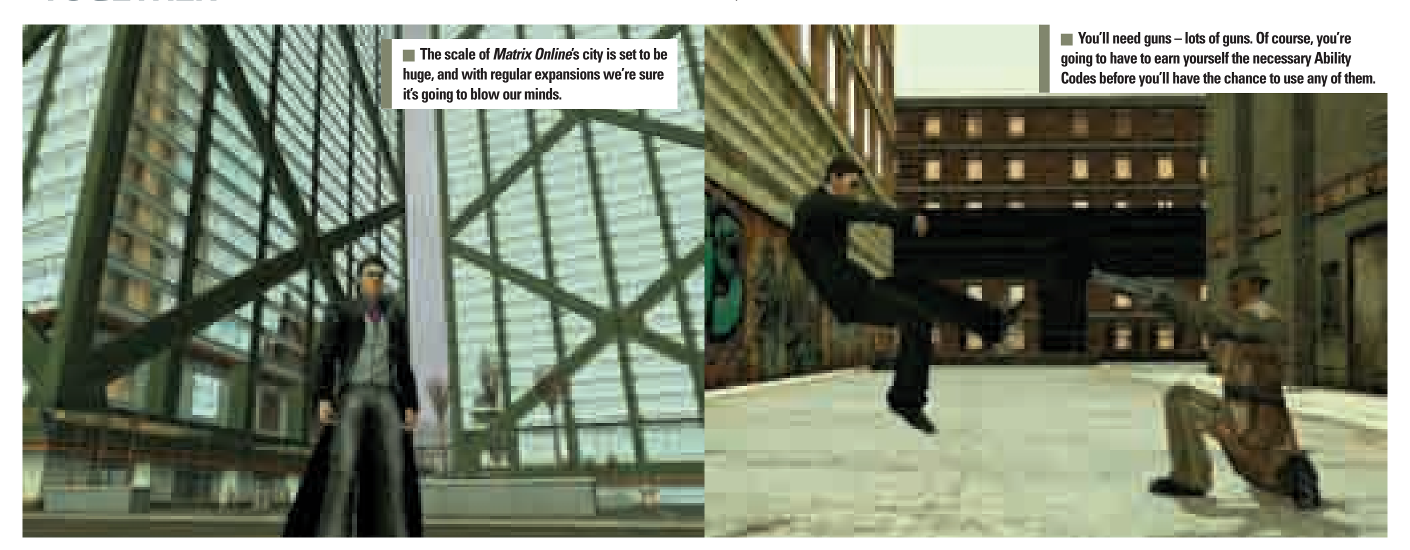
TIME FOR A LOCK-IN

To say that MMORPG combat isn't exactly riveting would be a bit of an understatement, so Monolith has worked hard to maintain the fast-paced action of *The Matrix* without making things too complex. The result is a process called Interlock – a huge system of choreographed animations created in pairs that flow together seamlessly and allow characters to fight against one another in intricate combat sequences, even using complex combos and Bullet Time moves with relative ease. Players choose between speed, power and defence for each move, all in real-time rather than in a turn-based fashion, which are then played out on-screen according to each character's current list of available moves and skills. Here's hoping it works as well as it sounds it will…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: WBIE
DEVELOPER: Monolith
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

Finally, the game that could do the concept of The Matrix justice – if it brings something new to the MMORPG genre, that is.



The scale of *Matrix Online*'s city is set to be huge, and with regular expansions we're sure it's going to blow our minds.

You'll need guns – lots of guns. Of course, you're going to have to earn yourself the necessary Ability Codes before you'll have the chance to use any of them.

THE MATRIX ONLINE CONT.

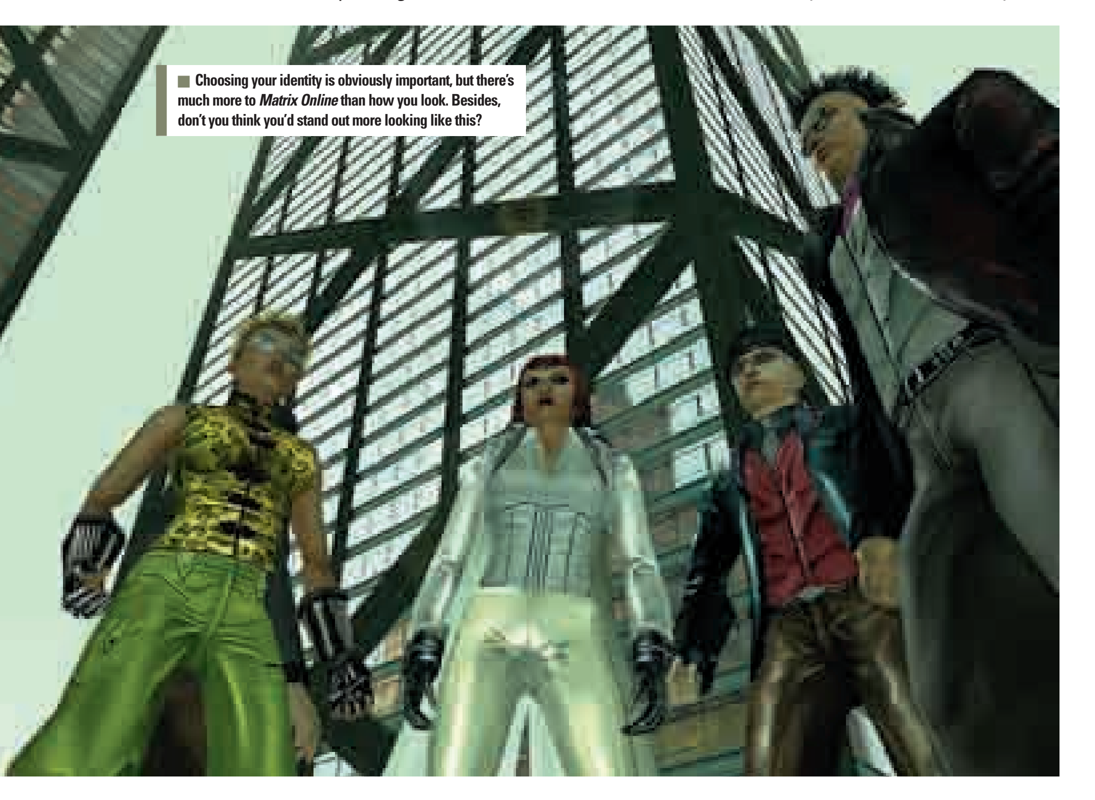
"THERE'S CERTAINLY A FOCUS ON THE ACTION SIDE OF THINGS BUT, THANKFULLY, THIS ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT THE GAME HAS GOING FOR IT"

As well as this extensive and almost game-altering effect that you can have on The Matrix depending on how you play, developing your character has a much more immediate range of influences. For example, it can dictate how you'll need to approach certain situations depending on which Ability Tree you follow. Split into three major categories (with many sub-categories within), the Ability Trees manage your character's skills and allow you to modify your game experience accordingly, much like the Biomod system in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. For example, a player using Soldier abilities will be able to learn many styles of martial arts, as well as use firearms like rifles and machine-guns, which in turn lead to more specialist moves like performing cartwheels while shooting and incorporating walls into attack combos.

If, however, you went down the Hacker route, then your abilities would be tailored towards direct manipulation of The Matrix's code; using viral programs to disrupt an enemy or applying virtual upgrades to enhance your character's attributes. Not surprisingly, players are limited to how many abilities they can use at once and some of the more advanced skills require other abilities to be 'loaded' into your character before you can use them. Thankfully, Ability Code can be swapped in and out (according to how you want to progress) and traded with other players.

But while using specific Ability Code is a key part of progression in *The Matrix Online*, there are plenty of other ways to make yourself useful in the game world. Money, for instance, is useless in The Matrix and if you want to live the easy life you'll be far better off finding decent sources of Information. Finding hidden Data Nodes will allow you to tap into the source of The Matrix itself, which in turn allows you to gather Information that can be traded with other players. The larger the Node, the 'richer' you'll become – although finding such an output not only pits you against your fellow players, but also against the Agents who still act as the guardians of the Matrix and will do anything to stop thieves. And if you think you can outfight an Agent, you'd better be prepared…

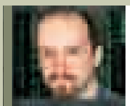
All this sounds intriguing and we've got high hopes that Monolith will be able to create the most enjoyable *Matrix*-based experience yet (not that that would be difficult). However, there's also the argument that all Monolith has done so far is adapt everything we understand about MMORPGs and use the philosophy of *The Matrix* to give it a glossy paintjob. With monthly charges already confirmed, the lure of being able to be part of The Matrix isn't quite enough to warrant regular payments. And then there's the involvement of the Wachowski brothers themselves. With the pair having an active involvement in the development of the game's storyline, there's always a chance that *The Matrix Online* might have a few too many Architect-style moments for its own good…



Choosing your identity is obviously important, but there's much more to *Matrix Online* than how you look. Besides, don't you think you'd stand out more looking like this?

ZION VS ZION

The majority of today's MMORPGs focus solely on co-operation in order to succeed, which is nice if you want to make friends but not all that stimulating when you're hacking the head off a computer-controlled dragon. *The Matrix Online*, however, brings in the grand possibility of 'player versus player' confrontations that may be necessary depending on the circumstances – for instance, if you and a rival both discover the same Data Node and need a more physical means of deciding who gets to tap it. Naturally, the majority of the more standard missions will offer their own source of AI-controlled enemies to duel with, but with all those martial arts on offer and so many real people to use them on… Who could resist?



DESIGNER PROFILE

As MMP creative director at Monolith and with over eight years of experience with massively multiplayer games, Toby Ragaini is perfectly suited to be lead designer on *Matrix Online*. He also has a BA in molecular biology and worked as a member of a genetic research team before entering the games industry.

HISTORY

ASHERON'S CALL 1999 [PC]

Just because you're fighting for the greater good, that doesn't mean you have to play nice with other people.

Fight sequences are co-ordinated through a system called Interlocking – the goal is to keep the action flowing without making things too complex.

"OUR GOAL IS TO CREATE A MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAME THAT REFLECTS THE TRILOGY'S HIGHLY STYLISED STORYTELLING AND INNOVATIVE ACTION"

JOEL SILVER, PRODUCER, THE MATRIX TRILOGY

Monolith's aim with *Matrix Online* is to create an online version of the movie – something that seems more than a little ambitious.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER



"THIS PUSHES BACK THE AESTHETIC BOUNDARIES THAT HAVE ELEVATED THE METAL GEAR SERIES ABOVE ITS CONTEMPORARIES"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALL THE ACTION, BUT TAKE AWAY THE BLOODSHED

RAMBO - OPERATION WOLF x SPLINTER CELL = MGS3

Disguising yourself in a Fire suit in the middle of a forest isn't a particularly good move.

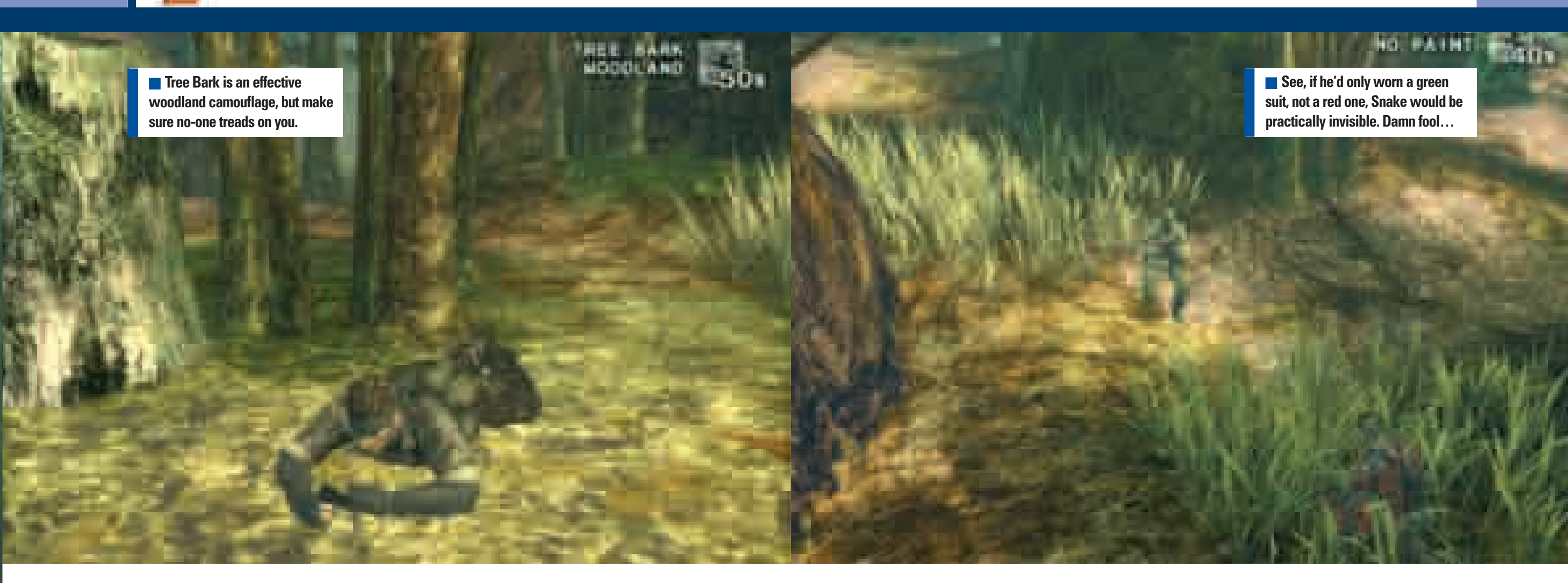


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Konami has been on the cutting edge of videogame development as long as there have been games, and is responsible for influential titles from *Castlevania* on the NES to *Silent Hill* on the PSone to the current *Pro Evo* series on PS2. The developer has also been mainly responsible for the emergence of peripheral-led gaming, with its Bemani range of dance and music titles.

HISTORY

- **CY GIRLS** 2004 [PS2]
- **MGS2: SONS OF LIBERTY** 2001 [PS2]
- **METAL GEAR SOLID** 1997 [PSone]



Tree Bark is an effective woodland camouflage, but make sure no-one treads on you.

See, if he'd only worn a green suit, not a red one, Snake would be practically invisible. Damn fool…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: Q4 '04 (US: April '04)
GENRE: Action Stealth
PLAYERS: 1

After army bases and oil rigs, Hideo Kojima takes Solid Snake into the jungle for a Sixties-based game of hide-and-seek with the enemy.

DON'T FORGET YOUR PORTABLE JUNGLE WARDROBE

PS2 **It's scary in this industry how quickly the ground-breaking becomes familiar and, inevitably, mundane.** Sequels are churned out with little innovation or sense of consumer value. So after the mis-step of *Sons Of Liberty*, Konami is investing a great deal of time and energy into making Solid Snake's next appearance something more than a typical action licence sequel.

Of course, it's also worth noting that it's now the best part of a decade since Hideo Kojima unleashed the brilliant *Metal Gear Solid* upon the PlayStation – and that Konami is still only preparing Snake's third 3D outing when other titles have seen up to seven sequels. So out goes the twisty-turny pretentiousness of *MGS2*, and in comes a Sixties jungle setting, complete with booby traps, living wildlife and trees to climb. Since last year's E3, there has been a steady flow of new features announced for the title, including animal eating, hanging from overhead boughs and dislodging wasps' nests onto unsuspecting enemies – and, as these new screenshots demonstrate, Kojima-san has also implemented a camouflage system, which we recently saw in action at Konami HQ.

Kojima-san's presentation (as it was) consisted of a Powerpoint display and a six-minute camouflage tutorial video, and ably demonstrated the simplicity of the system and its ease of use. Based around a percentage camouflage index (with 100 per cent equating to complete concealment), Snake's basic level of visibility is dictated by his posture, with his clothing and face paint raising or lowering the index score. There are seven fabric patterns from which to choose, with more promised as available for download after the game's release.

Standing up will give you 45 per cent camouflage (with crouching offering 60 per cent and lying flat 80 per cent), though movement will obviously lower this score, with even slow movement carrying an 80 per cent chance of being seen, and running akin to donning ankle-bells and a Day-Glo vest. The effectiveness of clothing depends on the environment, and each outfit corresponds to a terrain: black kit is good against earth or shadow; 'tree bark' allows chameleonic back-to-tree hiding; 'leaf' relates to foliage or fallen leaves; 'olive drab' marries with moss and some reeds; and 'tiger stripe' hides your hero in the grass. The last two outfits ('fire' and 'snow') are weather-, rather than environment-, specific, suggesting that the finished game will span a range of locations.

Intriguingly, the video never featured Snake engaging in combat; the emphasis was purely on personifying the military ghost and becoming one with the undergrowth. The physical implementation of the disguise element looked extremely effective too, with enemy AI routines proving logical, and leading to many tense instances of guards searching the brush as Snake stood right in front of them. Of course, the effect will be laughable if we're unable to believe Snake is really hidden, but we were pleased to discover that not only will a 100 per cent index hide him from enemies, but it actually becomes something of a challenge to see him on-screen, despite having just positioned him.

We'll have an opportunity to see exactly how all the new elements will hold together at next month's E3. However, it so far seems unlikely that Snake's exploits will disappoint to the degree Raiden's did last time.

YOU AIN'T SEEN ME, RIGHT?

Snake's camouflage sets can be used in ways you may not expect. So snow camouflage, while useless against most surfaces, offers a small degree of cover when submerged neck-deep in water. And while wearing a tiger-striped ensemble in a forest will offer less protection than the leaf pattern, it's better than the fire design. From early footage, black looks to be a good all-purpose camo set, but only if you're prepared to skulk in the shadows and not engage the enemy. However, it is possible in moments of extreme conspicuousness for your camouflage index to drop below zero – standing around in black will be just as useless as a red suit in a snowy scene.

"FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SNAKE'S EXPLOITS WILL DISAPPOINT TO THE DEGREE RAIDEN'S DID LAST TIME"

KILLER 7



Coyote Smith not only has the power to move through physical matter, he's also at odds with all the other Smiths.

Take down a Heaven's Smile-possessed human and they'll erupt in a shower of blood. Lovely…

THREE MAY BE THE MAGIC NUMBER, BUT WE LIKE THE SOUND OF SEVEN

PS2 **Does the word 'exclusive' mean anything nowadays?** Once upon a time, the likes of *Killer 7*, *Resident Evil 4*, *P.N.03* and *Viewtiful Joe* were all GameCube exclusives, and because of this, many Nintendo owners felt a warm, fuzzy glow inside. Now, though, it appears that Capcom has had a change of heart, as *Killer 7* has defected to the PS2. Don't get us wrong, we're more than happy that Capcom's unique shooter will be reaching a larger audience (it's still being released on the Cube), but you have to wonder about the stability of Capcom's other so-called exclusives. Still, gripes aside, information is continuing to trickle out of Capcom's seemingly watertight Japanese offices and it appears that there's more to *Killer 7* than meets the eye.

Using both a first- and third-person perspective, Capcom's latest title places you in the wheelchair-bound frame of master assassin Harman Smith. Despite looking like a regular pensioner who's just returned from a Darby and Joan excursion, Smith's ability to take over seven distinct personalities means he's not a man to be trifled with. His alter egos range in age and ability from a 14-year-old child with exceptional hearing to a masked 38-year-old whose weapons of choice are two huge grenade launchers. All seven distinct personalities must be exploited if you wish to unravel *Killer 7*'s sci-fi-esque plot.

"SOME MIGHT BAULK AT ITS CEL-SHADING, BUT KILLER 7 LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER UNIQUE FEATHER IN CAPCOM'S CAPACIOUS HAT"

With global terrorism reaching critical levels, the whole world has joined forces in order to restore peace. Numerous anti-terrorist organisations are formed, with governments even going so far as to halt all air and land travel for two years in a bid to bring a stop to crazed madman Kun Lan. Thanks to a virus known as Heaven's Smile, Lan is able to turn a person into a gibbering, psychotic shadow of their former selves by simply looking at them. Unsurprisingly, not only is Lan never invited to cocktail parties, he's also caught the attention of Smith, who's been hired to stop the psychopath once and for all.

While the majority of *Killer 7*'s gameplay seems to be heavily rooted in blowing away as many adversaries as possible, it's been revealed that character interaction will also play an important part in the game. Capcom has said that each of Smith's personalities' individual skills will feature heavily, although it's reluctant to explain exactly how these will work within the main game. What we do know is that creatures affected by Heaven's Smile come equipped with a Predator-like cloaking device which enables them to initially escape detection. Once you've thoroughly scanned a screen and locked onto a foe, a single shot causes the device to fail, enabling you to fill them with as much hot lead as possible. To ensure that the game doesn't suffer from *Virtua Cop* syndrome (the same guys appearing in the same places) each new game will have your enemies appearing in different places, meaning that no two games should ever play the same.

Of course, it would be easy to say that for all its stylised and moody looks *Killer 7* could turn out to be little more than a dramatic case of style over substance. Nevertheless, as its Japanese release date draws closer we're becoming more intrigued with this unique-looking game. So far, every title we've seen from Production Studio 4 has proved to be something special. Hopefully, *Killer 7* will continue this tradition.

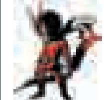
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?

While it's not been revealed exactly how Harman has control over the seven other Smiths, we do know that each Smith is aware that they are somehow linked to Harman (although they don't realise that Harman is somehow controlling all of them). Needless to say, we're expecting *Killer 7*'s storyline to become more convoluted than an episode of *The X-Files* (though hopefully with slightly better acting). Playing *Killer 7* will reveal the true mechanics behind Harman's abilities, but for the moment, our bets are on some form of schizophrenia – à la James Mangold's *Identity*. The various Smiths may have been shown interacting with each other at various stages of the game, but that's not to say they've not all been created from the mind of one warped individual.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Originally one of the famous five from Production Studio 4, *Killer 7* looks set to be the studio's most original title yet.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Production Studio 4 was formed in 2002 under the leadership of *Resident Evil's* creator Shinji Mikami. Currently overseen by Noritaka Funamizu, its most well-known title is *Viewtiful Joe,* although we're expecting it to be usurped by the impressive-looking *Resident Evil 4.*

HISTORY

■ **VIEWTIFUL JOE** 2003 [GameCube]
■ **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PlayStation2]
■ **DINO CRISIS** 2000 [Dreamcast]

■ Dan is just one of the eight Smiths. He comes with the handy ability to change bullet trajectories.

■ Once you've successfully revealed an opponent, you can fill them with more holes than a slab of Emmental.

■ Don't be fooled by the cel-shaded look, this is one violent game.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EIGHT PERSONALITIES, ONE GAME

IDENTITY + CEL SHADING x HIGH-OCTANE VIOLENCE = KILLER 7

"I BELIEVE THAT KILLER 7 IS TOTALLY UNIQUE SO IT REALLY CAN'T BE COMPARED TO ANY OTHER GAME"

HIROYUKI KOBAYASHI, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS



Engaging in combat is not a good idea, so get around quietly.

Some arrows will help in specific situations. Create a distraction with a Noisemaker.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIPTOES ALL THE WAY

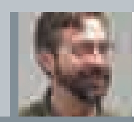
STEALTH + THIEVERY x DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR = THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

"THIEF WAS THE GAME THAT, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, INSPIRED ME TO BUILD A TEAM TO CREATE DEUS EX"

WARREN SPECTOR, STUDIO DIRECTOR, ION STORM

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

After working on several dice-based RPGs at Steve Jackson Games and TSR, Warren Spector joined the videogame industry in 1989 with Origin Systems. His time at Ion Storm began in 1997, and in 2000 he cemented his place in gaming's hall of fame with genre-defying masterpiece *Deus Ex*.

HISTORY

- **DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR** 2004 [Xbox, PC]
- **DEUS EX** 2000 [PC]
- **SYSTEM SHOCK** 1994 [PC, Mac]

CAN ION STORM'S 'OTHER' GAME STEAL THE LIMELIGHT FROM DEUS EX?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Ion Storm
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Stealth Action
PLAYERS: 1

The original stealth action game gets a new lease of life courtesy of Ion Storm's impressive *Invisible War* engine.

After the unprecedented success of stealth-'em-up series such as *Hitman*, *Tenchu* and *Splinter Cell*, the gaming world seems to have become obsessed with skilfully avoiding conflict, rather than the trigger-happy mentality of old. Although there's still plenty of room for those games that uphold the time-honoured art of dashing headlong at a group of enemies in a button-tapping frenzy, today's stealth-conscious gamer has been conditioned to search for a more calculated solution. Yet while the aforementioned titles are frequently credited with defining this genre, PC gamers will tell you it was the original *Thief* game that pioneered the whole stealth-over-butchery concept back in 1998.

Now the ground-breaking series is poised to take centre stage once more with its suitably lavish third instalment and, thanks to the interest generated by its more recent big-name peers, a far larger audience should be willing sit up and listen this time. Industry legend Warren Spector readily points to *Thief: The Dark Project* as being his chief inspiration in creating the great *Deus Ex*, yet in an ironic twist of fate the cutting-edge technology and celebrated gameplay elements from *Deus Ex: Invisible War* are now being drawn upon to bring the *Thief* universe to life more vividly than ever.

From the outset it's strikingly obvious that the impressive dynamic lighting, advanced Havok physics and richly mapped textures are the work of an enhanced *DE:IW* engine, but venturing beneath the surface reveals just how many aspects of Ion Storm's skilfully woven sci-fi epic have found their way into *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. But despite such strong evidence of *DE:IW*'s influence being used to wonderfully flesh out the game world, fans will be pleased to learn this is definitely a *Thief* game through and through.

Master thief Garrett returns in the title role, slinking in and out of the shadows. The traditional mission-based structure has been interspersed with *Deus Ex*-style city roaming, where players are invited to freely explore the living medieval environments to their heart's content and take full advantage of any opportunities they stumble upon to make a fast buck. Whether turning your light-fingered talents to a key story-based mission or incidental spot of entrepreneurial larceny, there will always be a rich platter of means by which your prize may be reached.

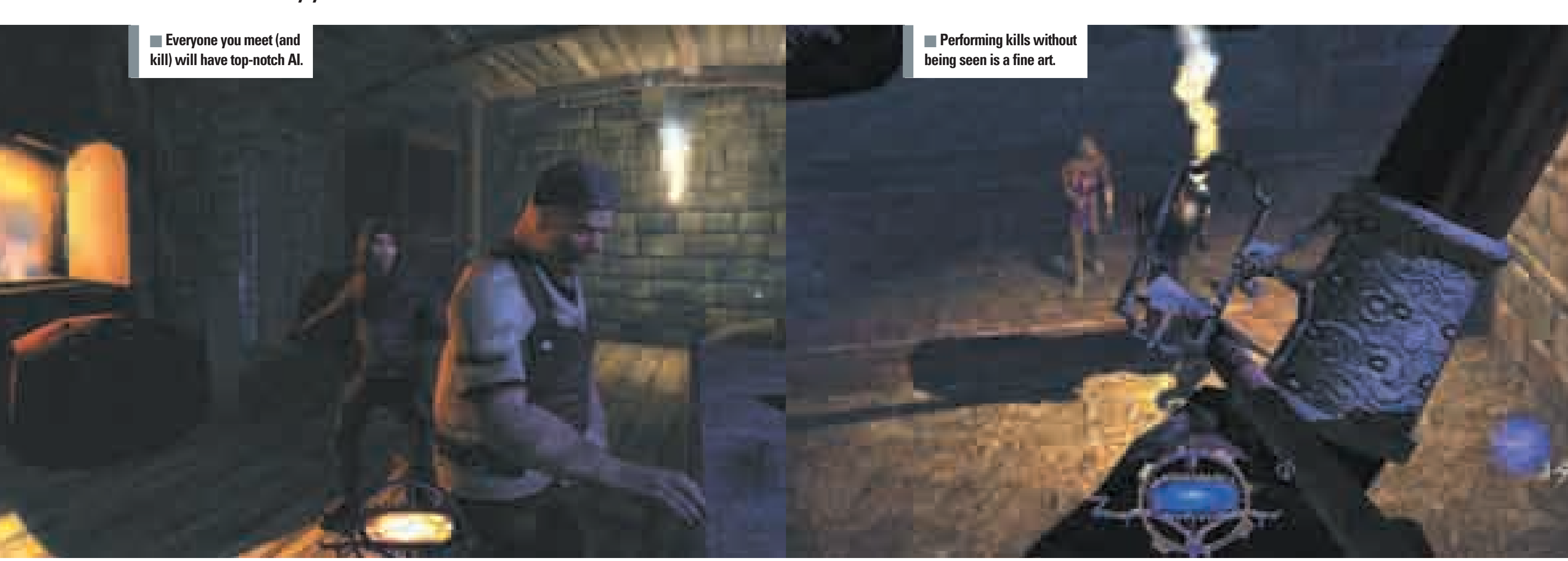
As ever, head-on combat is strongly discouraged with players being forced to engage their cunning and patience to make it past the legions of guards undetected. Advanced AI is obviously key to the whole stealth concept, and Ion Storm is striving to perfect some of the most convincing NPC behaviour to date, furnishing them with a vast repertoire of phrases to verbally illustrate their various states of alertness. Helpfully, an all-new third-person viewpoint gives players greater appreciation of Garrett's level of concealment, while fans of the familiar first-person perspective are similarly treated to increased 'body awareness' to avoid any inadvertent scenery clattering.

By embellishing the unique strengths of the *Thief* series with those ingredients that gave the *DE:IW* universe such engrossing depth and vitality, *Deadly Shadows* looks certain to bring Garrett the widespread recognition he deserves.

YOU AIN'T SEEN ME, RIGHT?

Garrett's tool kit leaves players at quite a disadvantage in toe-to-toe combat, yet provides everything a medieval master of stealth would need to keep contact with his foes to a minimum. A pair of Wall-Scaling Gloves ensures Garrett's progress isn't restricted to ground level, while his Blackjack Truncheon and Assassin's Blade inflict a swift demise on unsuspecting prey. Most valuable of all is his versatile Bow, which not only provides an effective sniping weapon but also creates a number of other tactical possibilities. Water Arrows, for instance, can be used to snuff out torches and create more shadows to hide in – or even to wash away the telltale bloodstains left by your victims.

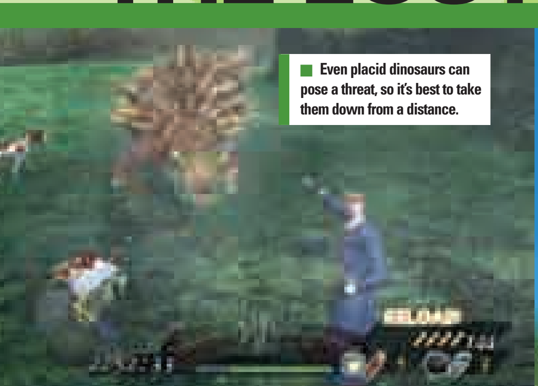
"ION STORM IS STRIVING TO PERFECT THE MOST CONVINCING NPC BEHAVIOUR YET"



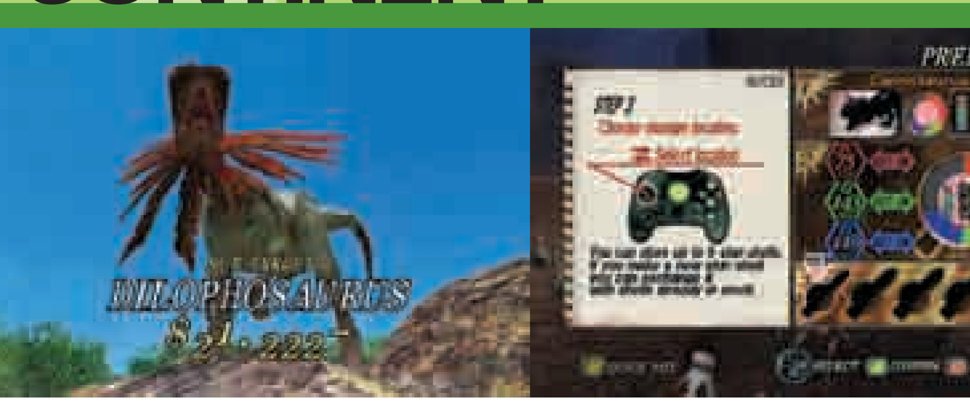
Everyone you meet (and kill) will have top-notch AI.

Performing kills without being seen is a fine art.

DINOSAUR HUNTING: THE LOST CONTINENT



Even placid dinosaurs can pose a threat, so it's best to take them down from a distance.



FULLY-GROWN DEER AND GRIZZLY BEARS JUST DON'T CUT IT ANY MORE

Hunting isn't exactly a favoured hobby round here, but there's certainly something to be said for the virtual outdoors, sitting in the rendered undergrowth for hours at a time and shooting anything that even blinks. Unfortunately, not all gamers have the patience of a saint (or the desire to pop caps in the heads of simulated 'real-life' animals, for that matter), which is why Metro3D's upcoming *Dinosaur Hunting* might be more suitable – if not for the more upbeat arcade tempo, then because you're saving animals as opposed to mounting their heads over your fireplace.

Placing you as one of the crack hunters sent in by the heroic Ark Foundation, the objective is fairly simple (if slightly fantastical): a remote island populated with dinosaurs is under threat from volcanic destruction and it's up to you to 'capture' as many of the dinosaurs as possible so they can be taken to safety. Of course, actually bagging yourself a Brachiosaurus isn't quite as easy as your average deer – especially since you're trying to get them out in one piece as opposed to blowing them away – so you need to use various research skills to not only track the beasts, but also discover the quickest way to bring each dinosaur down.

Each mission has you chasing a main target, as well as several sub-targets that can be caught if you want the extra cash. Initially, you're armed with a shotgun, a rifle and a pistol that fires weak tranquilliser bullets, all of which can be used to take down anything in your way. However, to knock out a target with relative safety, you need to find out each one's genetic make-up and use it to create a special stun dart unique to that dinosaur. This in itself requires searching for dino-related articles, from carcasses and nests to steaming piles of dinosaur dung that, when examined, yield the right formula. Use the formula to make a stun dart, fire it at the target's weak spot and bingo – one captured dino.

This might all sound pretty underwhelming, but it's actually surprisingly good fun. There are all the other nuances of hunting to consider too, such as sneaking rather than running, staying downwind to avoid being detected and so on, and yet this doesn't become the tedious waiting game that you'd expect thanks to its arcade styling.

Unfortunately, the whether the game will ever make it out over here is still being decided – Metro3D is unsurprisingly wary about releasing a game that could disappear without trace on UK shelves. Naturally, this is one title that might be worth keeping on the edge of your radar (you know, just in case) but if the axe does fall on a UK launch, it'll be a real shame.

> "THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCHING AND MIXING THE RIGHT FORMULA FOR EACH DINOSAUR IS INTRIGUING"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Metro3D
DEVELOPER: Scarab
RELEASE: TBC '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Mix one part brain-teasing research with three parts blasting anything that moves. Think hunting with an arcade-style feel and you're getting warm.



Some of the later stages can get pretty hazardous, especially if you're outnumbered by some nasty beasts.


eMag

FORGOTTEN REALMS: BLOODSTONE



Stop this summoned snake god from gorging on his minions, or you'll be turned into toast. Hey, tough break.

BECAUSE THREE DUNGEONEERS ARE BETTER THAN ONE, OBVIOUSLY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Stormfront Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (TBC)

Atari throws some arcade-style action at the D&D formula.

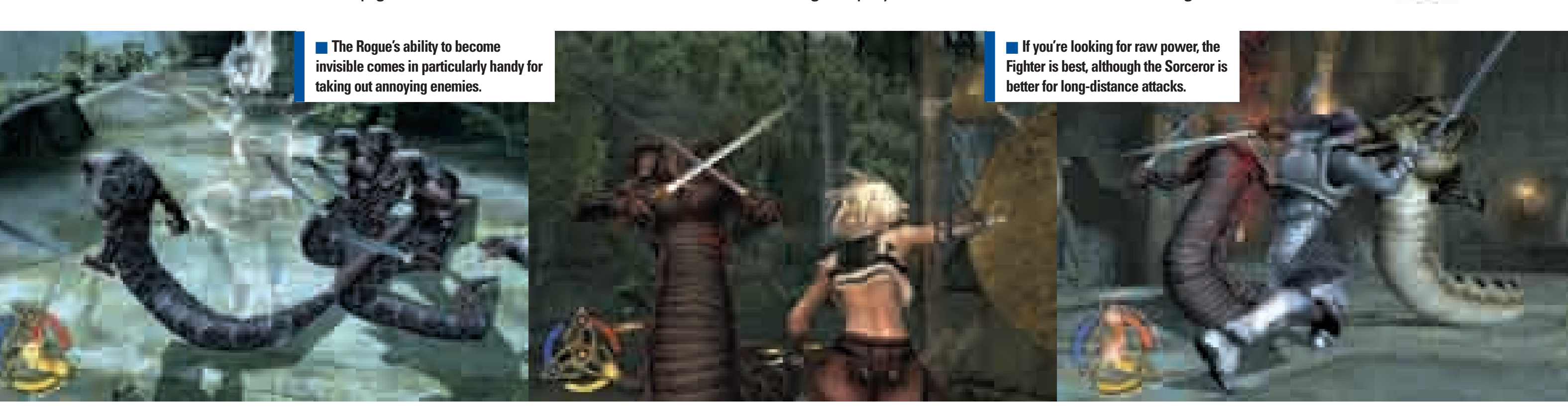
There's nothing new about Dungeons & Dragons-based games that focus on the action side of things – we have fond memories of pumping coins into *Tower Of Doom* and *Shadow Over Mystara*. However, this is the first take on the traditionally RPG-style *Forgotten Realms* series for a while now, and with Atari seemingly hell-bent on turning every game it releases into an arcade-action romp it's no surprise that *Bloodstone* falls neatly into the pigeonhole labelled 'Hack 'n' slash'.

Before your expectations drop too low, though, there is a masterstroke. In order to create what it considers to be the best game possible, Atari has hired the talents of Stormfront Studios (the people behind EA's *Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers*) and put its impressive slash-'em-up engine to good use, though not before making some enhancements. Improved visuals and AI are definitely the order of the day, but Stormfront has made one vital change that takes the gameplay in a new direction.

> "THE ACTION-INTENSIVE GAMEPLAY MIGHT APPEAL MORE THAN COMPLEX GAME MECHANICS"

The big twist with *Bloodstone* is that players have not one, but three characters at their disposal with the enhanced AI helping you in combat while you control the character of your choice. Playing as either a Fighter, a Sorcerer or a Rogue at any one time, you can switch between them (depending on the skills you need for the current circumstances) simply by pressing the relevant button. You also have the option to upgrade your characters with experience, which opens up new abilities according to which attribute you choose and allows you to customise your playing experience even further. However, in order to prevent players simply sticking to a single character and excluding the others, each one will have their own 'spotlight' sections that push you to make the most of their individual skills (such as the Fighter's strength or the Rogue's guile).

Having played through several stages, it's easy to see *Bloodstone*'s potential; Atari's decision to pick up where *Two Towers* left off is one that could really pay off. Whether true D&D fans will appreciate seeing their favourite series reduced to a button-mashing action-fest remains to be seen, but those looking for a less mentally taxing D&D outing will be satisfied.



The Rogue's ability to become invisible comes in particularly handy for taking out annoying enemies.

If you're looking for raw power, the Fighter is best, although the Sorceror is better for long-distance attacks.


eMag

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

DETAILS
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: tri-Ace
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ Set almost a thousand years in the future, this latest *Star Ocean* title is set to fill the gap left in the PAL market by a seemingly forgotten *Xenosaga*.

YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER IS PRETTY FINE…

PS2 **Never let it be said that Square Enix rushes its games out.** The PAL market is still waiting for *Final Fantasy XI*, *Chrono Trigger* and *Parasite Eve* to name but a few, and there's always a long enough gap between its key titles to build anticipation to an uncontrollable level. But now, for whatever reason, much of Square Enix's less well-known catalogue is being shipped out of Japan. And as the usual suspects come out with the same old content time and time again, it's to these underdogs that we must look for more imaginative or original adventuring.

The first piece of good news comes by way of the fact that the localised version of *Star Ocean* will most likely be based on the *Director's Cut* edition of the game that was recently unleashed upon Japan. This would mean being packaged on two discs in order to reincorporate features left out due to space restrictions. These include new playable characters, dungeons and an entire new mode of play, offering versus battle action for two players. *Star Ocean* is very proud of its cinematic style – not in a *Xenosaga* 'save mid-cut-scene' passive kind of way (well, not quite) but through clever direction and use of every element in harmony to really immerse the player in the game's vision of the future.

The game itself is set way into the future (772 SD more specifically – 'Space Date' starting from man's first interstellar trip in the late 21st Century), and from what seems like quite a promising premise it soon ends up tackling the same old RPG themes. Not that there's anything wrong with this – an old topic covered well is far preferable to a convoluted take on difficult new subject matter. Angst-ridden teen lead Fate Linegod is the centre of attention, getting separated from everything he knows to be true as the game begins and having to partake in a galaxy-trawling quest to win it all back.

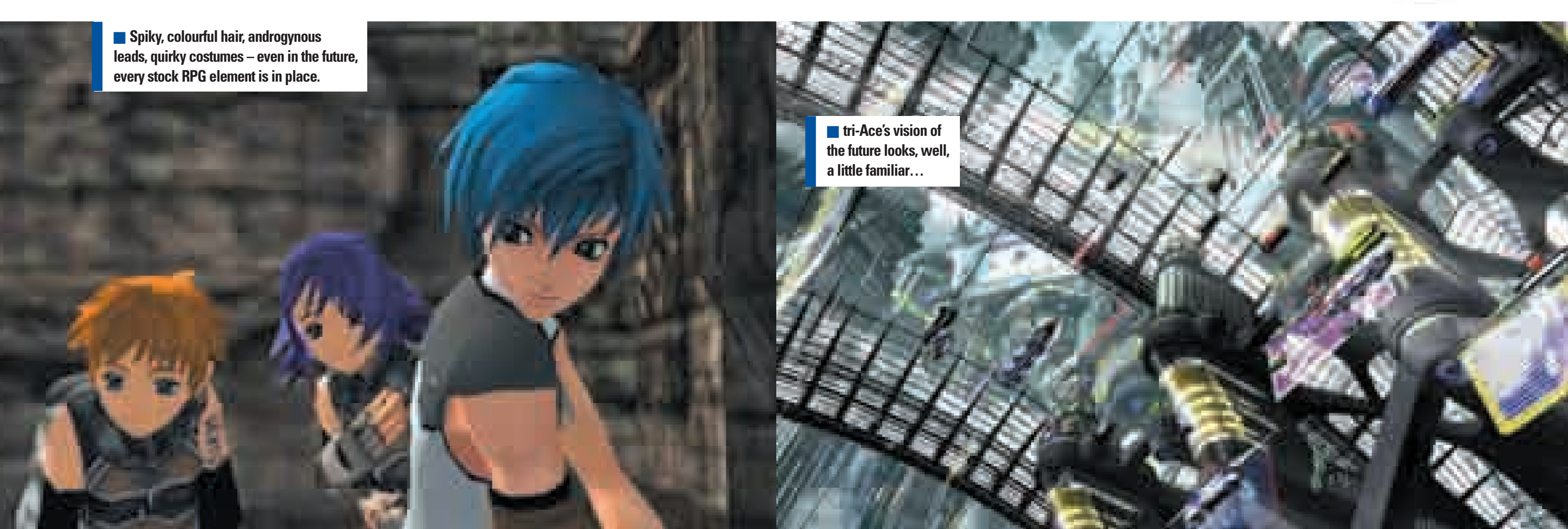
We're promised improvements to the more popular features of the series and even to the fundamental elements – the battle system, for one, has undergone major renovation. In what is basically a real-time system, you take full control of one of the three participants (with the welcome option to switch mid-battle) while the computer governs the other two. Augmentations have also been made within the Item Creation and Personal Action systems, two features that not only helped the second game stand clear of the pack but also two of the most popular elements among the series' fans. As such, the extra depth and scope should please most players, assuming, that is, that things aren't taken to such a degree that they get out of hand or just too daunting.

Given that its branching predecessor made it to our shores, it's safe to assume *Till The End Of Time* will appear here too. Having suffered delays in the US, the game is currently slated for an August release in Europe. We're interested to see not just how the finished game turns out but perhaps more how the UK takes to it. While we're used to seeing the likes of *Final Fantasy* top the charts, the outside bets are seldom seen on shelves, let alone in sales listings. If nothing else, we can hope this latest epic fares better than fallen warriors such as *Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter* and *Unlimited SaGa*. Surely the market hasn't become so predictable as to knock out all bar the most established RPGs? In six months time we should know for sure.

A DESIGN FOR LIFE

Going on past performances, *Till The End Of Time* could be the most appropriate gaming sub-head in years. You see, the second game in the series boasted 86 endings depending on how you played through it, so if you did want to see every finale you'd be looking at putting aside about a year of your life. Cue the arrival of this third title, promising bigger and better things in just about every area, so we have to assume that *Till The End Of Time* plans to suck away even more of our precious lives. There's been no confirmation of the number of potential climaxes to this tale, but series rules dictate that playing through once will hardly give a fair impression of events.

"WE'RE INTERESTED TO SEE NOT JUST HOW THE FINISHED GAME TURNS OUT BUT HOW THE UK TAKES TO IT"



■ Spiky, colourful hair, androgynous leads, quirky costumes – even in the future, every stock RPG element is in place.

■ tri-Ace's vision of the future looks, well, a little familiar…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in 1995, tri-Ace is a fully independent developer despite close ties with Square Enix that may imply otherwise. Famed for its RPG output, the firm has won many fans with a steady flow of consistently good titles and currently employs a staff of nearly a hundred at its Tokyo offices.

HISTORY

- **VALKYRIE PROFILE** 2000 [PSone]
- **STAR OCEAN: THE SECOND STORY** 1999 [PSone]
- **STAR OCEAN** 1996 [SNES]

While basic visuals are rather simple, lighting and effects help to increase the graphical allure.

The battle system has had a revamp, with a new control system.

"STAR OCEAN LIVES UP TO ITS REPUTATION AS AN ASTOUNDING VISUAL CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE"
TRI-ACE PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DIVING BENEATH THE SURFACE OF STAR OCEAN

XENOSAGA + GRANDIA + VAGRANT STORY = STAR OCEAN: TTEOT

RESIDENT EVIL 4



"WITH A FRESH LOOK AND REDESIGNED CONCEPTS, RESIDENT EVIL 4 PRESENTS A FEAR MORE REAL THAN EVER BEFORE"

CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

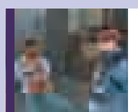
■ Basic enemies, environments and camera perspectives may have changed, but bosses remain as menacing as ever.

■ The Action button lets you perform a range of context-sensitive acts to stem the tide of enemies.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NAUSEATINGLY GORGEOUS CARNAGE

CODE: VERONICA + BEAUTY x BEASTS = RESIDENT EVIL 4



SERIES PROFILE

For many, the survival horror genre was born in 1996 when Capcom unleashed its zombie-laden *Resident Evil* thrill-fest to rapturous applause from PSone gamers. Despite facing a prestigious line-up of competitors over the years, the series continues to rank among the most highly regarded in its field.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL ZERO** 2003 [GameCube]
- **RESIDENT EVIL 2** 1998 [PSone]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PSone]



The third-person camera moves Leon to the side when the shooting starts, à la Sam Fisher.

CAN CAPCOM TAKE UP RESIDENCE AT THE GENRE'S HELM ONCE AGAIN?

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC '05 (Japan/US: Q4 '04)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

Capcom looks to revolutionise the *Resident Evil* series with a dynamic 3D camera and some menacingly realistic visuals.

Considering the calibre of the exclusive titles adorning the GameCube's software portfolio it's a wonder Nintendo's machine has struggled to win over many a gamer. But while big hitters *Metroid Prime*, *Zelda: The Wind Waker* and the visually sublime *Resident Evil Zero* have no doubt lent a massive helping hand to the console's sales figures, Capcom's latest Cube-only project could end up shifting more little purple boxes than anything else to date. The hype surrounding *Resident Evil 4* has been steadily building for more three years now and, although the finished product still isn't set to appear in the UK until 2005, anticipation levels are already approaching fever pitch thanks to the latest glimpses Capcom has given the world of its impending masterpiece in action.

For many fans of the genre, Konami's chilling *Silent Hill* series has, in recent years, stolen a hefty piece of the limelight from the once definitive *Resi* franchise, but Capcom is pulling out all the stops to win back its crown when the giants of survival horror go head to head yet again with their respective 'number fours'. Perhaps the most noticeable change to the trusted formula sees the series reverting to the kind of dynamic 3D camera first attempted in *Resident Evil – CODE: Veronica* on the Dreamcast. The dramatic fixed camera angles and pre-rendered backdrops synonymous with the rest of the *Resi* catalogue, and indeed much of the genre, will this time make way for a selection of player-determined perspectives. A choice of two innovative third-person viewpoints and even a first-person camera gives players free rein of the terrifying environments and should considerably up the immersion factor when the action is experienced first-hand through the eyes of returning hero Leon Kennedy.

Although Capcom is remaining tight-lipped about the bulk of the plot details at this stage, arguably the series' most memorable lead will be making a comeback in a story that takes place in South America some six years after the events of *Resident Evil 2*. Much of the game we've seen so far showcases vast outdoor sections unlike anything featured in previous episodes, yet even less recognisable to fans will be the adversaries lacing Leon's path with terror. Whereas past *Resi* games could be accused of portraying almost cartoon-like horror in contrast to the grisly realism depicted in its more shocking peers, *RE4* looks set to trade its army of traditional zombies for a more humanlike horde of demonically possessed villagers.

In bringing the gruesome creations to life with such photorealistic splendour, the jaw-dropping graphics engine looks certain to steal the show by injecting unnerving levels of authenticity into the nightmarish proceedings while simply eclipsing anything the Cube has ever produced in the visuals department. Textures throughout the sinister environments are astounding, the advanced lighting is used to wonderfully eerie effect, and character models for both the colossal boss creatures and their incredibly lifelike minions are among the most stunningly detailed to appear on any console.

Beautifully illustrating Capcom's determination to emphatically restore the series to its genre-defining form of old, the visuals on display hint at the level of polish being lavished on the project across the board. It all looks to be a tantalising step forward for the series and will certainly provide a massive exclusive for the struggling Cube.

WHAT'S AI GOT TO DO WITH IT?

As well as looking more human, the average *RE4* bad guy is also blessed with a good deal more intelligence than your typical mindless zombie. For the first time players will have to contend with enemies doing much more than staggering blindly towards your waiting shotgun barrel. Swarms of deranged villagers will demonstrate self-preservation instincts and even work together to lure you into ambushes. Thankfully, you'll have a couple of new features working in your favour too. Location-specific damage means a shrewdly placed shot to the leg will slow down advancing foes, while a series of context-sensitive special actions let you gain the upper hand in even more style.

> "THE VISUALS ON DISPLAY HINT AT THE LEVEL OF POLISH BEING LAVISHED ON THE PROJECT ACROSS THE BOARD"

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING



All the vehicles are easy to manoeuvre, and as you're able to carry passengers you'll have their lives in your hands.

WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

It's an unavoidable fact that online war games, both on PC and consoles, are a horribly popular diversion. EA's *Battlefield* games and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* are just a few examples of this booming genre, but since this field was born there has nearly always been *Delta Force*. NovaLogic's flagship series has been championing realism and scale for years, culminating in the forthcoming *Joint Operations* – a highly ambitious title based on a modified version of the *Black Hawk Down* engine. With five character classes, any number of skins and appearances, and a host of driveable vehicles as well as some of the largest maps in a game to date, it looks as though those years of hard work and updates may have paid off.

By the developer's own admission, the single-player aspect of the game is not a focal point, and while there will be a selection of solo missions these will be more akin to training or tutorial missions to make sure the player is ready for the epic online wars. With so many different vehicles and weapons with which to experiment this will prove a welcome inclusion, but the good news is that lighting up the skies in an attack helicopter is as easy as tearing around in an aquatic APC. Every vehicle can also carry passengers – dashing into battle knowing that it's not only your life on the line but the lives of the four soldiers adorning your exterior (who are even more vulnerable to your mistakes than you are) creates a hefty serving of responsibility. Keys are assigned simply to make switching seats an easy possibility, even allowing passengers to abandon ship at the first sight of trouble and perform all manner of evasive manoeuvres on foot. These soldiers really are multi-talented…

> "JOINT OPERATIONS IS A CONTINUATION AND EVOLUTION OF EVERYTHING NOVALOGIC HAS GIVEN US TO DATE"

One effect of which NovaLogic seems particularly proud is the 'super-foliation' in some of the deeper jungle maps. This is basically a technique for rendering extremely thick undergrowth. It's easy to see why the company is so happy with it and, combined with the impressive day/night cycle that lights the maps in accelerated real-time, there are some wonderfully impressive (not to mention realistic) locations. This makes for some truly stealthy possibilities, and with a combination of camouflage and darkness you'll be able to enjoy a level of concealment to which the forced shadows of *Manhunt*, *Rogue Ops* and the like can only aspire.

It remains to be seen, however, just how well the whole thing will come together on the scale that NovaLogic is touting, although we've been impressed with the smaller-scale conflicts we've seen and really look forward to seeing a full-scale war in action. While *Battlefield* and *Counter-Strike* have an unmistakably arcadey feel to them, *Joint Operations* is more a continuation and evolution of everything NovaLogic has given us to date. Realistic equipment selection and carry weights, accurate damage models, and superb mapping and lighting all combine to make for a scarily intense experience, recreating the best tension of, say, *Rainbow Six 3* on a scale seldom seen anywhere in gaming, let alone online.

Offering thrills and potential for gamers who like to slap on some camo paint and play sniper for a while to those who see themselves leading a platoon of tanks and jeeps into battle, *Joint Operations* is likely to be massive in every possible sense.

MOD ME, AMADEUS

With user mod tools shipping on the same day as the game itself, the NovaLogic team is clearly hoping for its many fans and NovaWorld users to get all creative and push the software into unknown territory. This is clearly still a major benefit of PC gaming over consoles – with everything from *Max Payne* to *Battlefield* getting modded to play differently (like the *Matrix* and *Star Wars* mods respectively for the aforementioned titles), and with games coming bundled with tools and tutorials to get the most out of them, exploiting this sizeable benefit is clearly and intelligently becoming a trend. We'll be interested to see both how this develops and also how Joe Public can twist *Joint Operations* beyond recognition. So, naturally, we'll be keeping a close eye on both aspects over the next few months.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NovaLogic
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: May '04
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1 (1-100 online)

Known for its large-scale and realistic tactical shooters, NovaLogic has taken the formula one step further and now offers battles on a scale we've never seen before.

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

NovaLogic was founded in 1985, but it wasn't until 1994 that the first European branch was opened. Specialising in tactical military action titles, it has established some real brand names like the *Delta Force* games. A privately owned company, its largest outside shareholder is Electronic Arts.

HISTORY

- **DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN** 2003 [PC]
- **TACHYON: THE FRINGE** 2000 [PC]
- **F-22 LIGHTNING 3** 1999 [PC]

Locations are not only huge but beautifully realised too. NovaLogic's hard work shows.

You can operate a range of vehicles. You can also make your own joke about choppers.

"JOINT OPERATIONS IS THE FUTURE OF WARFARE – IT IS THE SYNCHRONISED APPLICATION OF LAND, SEA AND AIR FORCES FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT"

LEE MILLIGAN, PRESIDENT, NOVALOGIC

Joint Ops promises to combine realism with playability, which sounds good to us.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

REAL WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

DELTA FORCE + BATTLEFIELD 1942 x REALISM = JOINT OPERATIONS

RED DEAD REVOLVER


Use the Dead Eye to target multiple enemies and then pull that trigger to unleash the wrath.

"I'M A COWBOY, ON A STEEL HORSE I RIDE..."

DETAILS
FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Rockstar
DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
RELEASE: 30 April
GENRE: Arcade Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

Head out to the Old West and step into the shoes of Clint Eastwood and every other big-screen Western hero, Rockstar style.

PS2 ***Red Dead Revolver*** **seemed for a long time to have been consigned to the Davy Jones' locker of videogames – the last we heard of the Western adventure, Angel Studios was at the helm and it was set to be released by Capcom.** Then it all went ominously quiet. We need not have worried, though, as Rockstar came along with a full wallet, plonked down the money to buy Angel Studios and in the process became the new owner of *Red Dead Revolver*. It was far from finished, however, and Rockstar's first move was to hand power back to the developer and give it free rein to ensure that not only was the game packed with as much classic Western iconography as possible, but that it was also filled with whatever the magic ingredient is that has made Rockstar one of the undisputed heavyweights in modern videogames.

The plot could easily have been lifted from any of the classic Sergio Leone movies of the Sixties – main character Red has seen his entire family murdered and is now out for revenge, pointing his trusty six shooter at anyone stupid enough to get in the way. But if alarm bells are going off in your head and you're anticipating huge cut-scenes and convoluted plot twists then fear not, *Red Dead Revolver* wouldn't have been out of place in an Eighties arcade – it is, in essence, a classic shoot-'em-up.

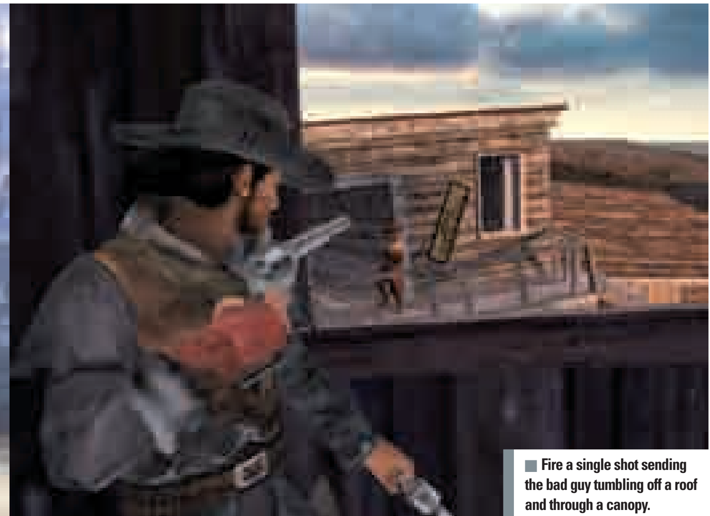
Each level is based around your 'traditional big boss who must be killed' pattern, while you also destroy all the trusty henchmen who stand in your way. The violence is non-stop too – as long as your main enemy remains alive, more of his goons will come after you. It's in your interest to kill them, as you receive money that can then be used to buy weapons, health and even multiplayer modes encompassing deathmatches to tense one-on-one duels.

Red has a massive arsenal of weapons, ranging from a small but trusty six-shooter to a series of rifles and even a hulking great Gatling gun that could stop a locomotive. Making the fights a little bit fairer, Red is also graced with a technique known as Dead Eye that allows you to slow down the action and pinpoint particular points on the enemy's body to target before unleashing a barrage of shots.

Rockstar may have kept us waiting, but it looks like *Red Dead Revolver* may have been worth it. Expect the full review next issue.

"RED DEAD REVOLVER WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN OUT OF PLACE IN AN EIGHTIES ARCADE – IN ESSENCE IT'S A CLASSIC SHOOT-'EM-UP"


A good cowboy never loses his hat and, thankfully, Red is the best in the business.


Fire a single shot sending the bad guy tumbling off a roof and through a canopy.


eMag

THE MOVIES



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MOVING PICTURES? IT'LL NEVER CATCH ON

THE SIMS x FILMS + CHOICE = THE MOVIES

"THERE IS NO OTHER GAME THAT ALLOWS YOU TO CREATE YOUR OWN MOVIES"

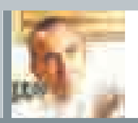
ADRIAN MOORE, DIRECTOR, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

■ If you build it, they will come… Creaky trailers and cheap sets won't attract the big names.

■ Horror movies can be taken in the direction of cheesy slashers or silent Nosferatu chillers.



THE MOVIES
PC/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Peter Molyneux has earned a reputation for exceptional 'sim' titles thanks to *Black & White*, *Theme Park* and *Populous*. Molyneux is also notorious for delays, as witnessed with the pantomime saga for a PlayStation2 version of *Black & White*, which hangs in limbo following three years of delays.

HISTORY

■ **BLACK & WHITE** 2001 [PC]
■ **THEME PARK** 1995 [PlayStation]
■ **POPULOUS** 1989 [Amiga]

FOR BUDDING KUBRICKS, KUROSAWAS AND COPPOLAS… THIS IS REEL LIFE

So you felt that for all its acclaim, *Star Wars* had a tendency to err on the wrong side of twee. Maybe you also thought *Schindler's List* dragged its heels and *Citizen Kane* needed a splash of claret to heighten the drama. Preposterous? Perhaps. But at least with film-studio simulation *The Movies* you get the chance to right Hollywood's wrongs and create a masterpiece of your own.

Lights. First, you need to set up your studio. This means dipping into your film budget to buy sets and buildings, which serve different purposes in time-honoured 'sim' tradition. For example, buy a research lab and you can start allocating resources to produce new costumes or scenery. You can dress the sets with props – adding them will affect the outcome of the scene when you finally step behind the camera. It's also important to buy a suitable trailer for your cast, otherwise your A-list stars will be storming off the set during filming.

Camera. You'll need appropriate performers to pout for the camera if you want to bring your three-hour Western epic to life. Star Creator takes centre stage here, allowing you to generate new talent or, more importantly, duplicate existing actors. You can customise any aspect from physical appearance to the name, so this should be comprehensive enough to realise your dreams of directing a romance flick starring Chuck Norris alongside Hilary Duff. If it sounds like too much trouble for too little reward, there will be the option to hire 'in-game' actors as well.

And action! The set's ready, your stars have signed up and all that's left is to shoot the movie. You'll need to choose what you'll be filming from around 2,000 scenes, although some scenes can only be used on certain sets. You also need to consider what type of scene your actor is suited to, so if you've got a Steven Seagal likeness then perhaps slapstick comedy isn't ideal. Finally, dress the actors, sit in the director's chair and watch the first scene unfold. You can use a slider bar to influence how the scene plays out – during a fight you can ramp up or tone down the violence, bearing in mind audiences don't want polite pugilists but extreme violence only sells to niche markets. Add more scenes, tweaking the audio and subtitles in the post-editing booth, and your film is ready to roll.

The concept nods to freeform play but extra missions and bonuses throughout ensure *The Movies* doesn't lose structure; for example, a Mafia boss might ask you to cast his daughter in one of your films. Doing so means you can avoid taxes for a few years but at the expense of your reputation. Add these missions to on-set inter-star romance, temperamental actors with their own entourage, and interfering paparazzi, and suddenly organising the logistics of the movie becomes almost as important filming the picture itself. Advisors will be on hand to help you keep your studio in check and there's an auto-management option for those who don't want to juggle finances to stay in the black.

In true Molyneux fashion, there's no word on a release date and plenty of questions yet to be answered, such as how many film genres will make it into the final version (will it be possible to replicate *The Matrix*'s gun-fu or *Braveheart*'s epic battles?). Despite that, it's hard not to be impressed by the ambition on offer and there's no denying the scope or confidence of Molyneux's vision.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Management
PLAYERS: 1

■ Build up a movie empire from the Twenties through to the modern day by directing blockbusters and fostering future film stars.

GENERIC BUDDY COP COMEDY #53

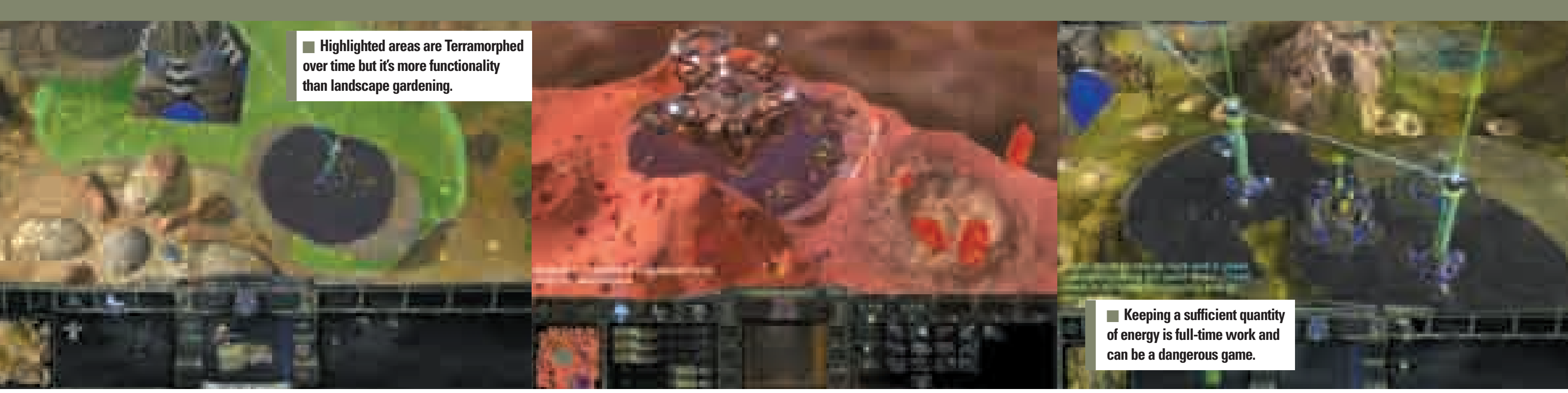
How well your film performs won't just depend on clever management of studios and stars. The script needs care too, otherwise ticket sales will drop off after the opening week. Conversely, a strong script coupled with small-time actors won't bring in the cash until word of mouth spreads. There are other factors to consider, such as the genre – too many babes-'n'-bombs bonanzas and the public will turn elsewhere (unless you're Jerry Bruckheimer). World events influence what films people will watch too. Interest in sci-fi films will soar when man lands on the moon, so make sure *The Space Diaries Of David Earnhart* is in the can by then.

> "THERE'S NO DENYING THE SCOPE OR CONFIDENCE OF MOLYNEUX'S VISION"



■ Different genres find favour in different eras. Here, the film mirrors the Sixties explosion of Westerns.

PERIMETER: REAL TIME STRATEGY REBORN



Highlighted areas are Terramorphed over time but it's more functionality than landscape gardening.

Keeping a sufficient quantity of energy is full-time work and can be a dangerous game.

WE USED TO BE PUSSWEEDS BUT NOW WE'RE METAL…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: 1C Company
RELEASE: May 21
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 online)

Combat has been evolved, driving simulated and now strategy will be reborn thanks to 1C. Big talk – can it back it up?

A real sense of scale is something far too few games manage to successfully convey. Pretty much every genre has been hit by this in the past, from racing around model villages to 16-man battles in an arena no bigger than a bungalow, so it's always refreshing to find a title that can impress with its sheer magnitude. At a glance, *Perimeter* would appear to be your average RTS – buildings all line up under traditional headings like barracks and generators, and terrain-altering vehicles dart about busily, but it's not until you start production that the size of everything becomes apparent. Soldiers are barely visible at the default view and the amount you can zoom in on the action is nothing short of staggering.

In addition, *Perimeter* is packed with interesting concepts. Terramorphing allows you to flatten land and tap resources, all affecting maps in real time to both good and bad effect. The Perimeter itself is a last-ditch defence shield that drains resources like crazy, and you can use Nanomorph technology to upgrade units on the fly. These are but a few of the jargon-filled ways in which *Perimeter* will be vying for the attention of the sun-shy gamer this summer. Further still, the developer has incorporated and built upon many genre stalwarts such as large-scale battles and resource management; more or less all the standard elements for this kind of game are present in some shape or form.

If only because the futuristic RTS is a genre that has been underrepresented since a boom in the late Nineties, it's been a pleasure to toy with *Perimeter*. There are some truly original ideas on board, and while the term 'reborn' may be a touch strong in defining what effect it will have on the genre, it's certainly progression in a fresh direction.

If anything, the game runs the risk of becoming bogged down in complications – the reason this genre was so big in its day is quite simply that anyone can pick up *Command & Conquer* or *Dune II*. Thanks to a rather busy interface, this just isn't the case with *Perimeter* and while this is the price to pay for adding more to a genre than many have dared, it does rather appropriately put up a barrier that may deter the less persistent player. But working hard can be fun sometimes too, you know…

> "THERE ARE SOME TRULY ORIGINAL IDEAS HERE, AND WHILE 'REBORN' MAY BE A BIT STRONG, IT'S CERTAINLY PROGRESSION"



Perimeter has a unique feel – there are more than enough pretty effects to bring your PC to its knees.


eMag

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES



Each hub of the game leads to numerous sub-maps where missions can be undertaken, such as blowing all kinds of things up.

WHO SAYS A COMPLEX RPG HAS TO BE BORING, EH?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Troika Games
RELEASE: Oct '04
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

The pencil-and-paper RPG evolves again from its previous game form into an action FPS that's heavy on the role-playing elements.

Just the thought of transferring one of the most revered pencil-and-paper role-playing games to the videogame format is one that we suspect would send many developers running for the hills. But it's a task that Troika Games has taken up with some relish, despite the possibility of a horde of fanatical players coming down on its head should it mess up. Not that it's planning to, going on how well *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is coming along.

Something of a departure from *Redemption* (the last attempt at bringing White Wolf's *Vampire* series to the videogame medium), the most obvious comparison you can make with Bloodlines is that it's *Deus Ex: Invisible War* with vampires; a first-person shooter with distinct RPG elements. However, Troika sees things the other way. "What we're doing differently from any other game out there is that *Bloodlines* is an RPG first," says Thaine Lyman, executive producer at Activision. "It's always been an RPG, which is one of the reasons why Troika is the developer because it's got a strong background in RPG development. This is a hardcore RPG with all the elements that you're used to, but then with new concepts from the first-person action world. Other games that are playing in that space go the opposite way by being shooters with RPG elements added in later."

The emphasis on the RPG side of things is reassuring, and it's obvious that the use of Valve's *Half-Life 2* engine is no bad thing – particularly as RPGs have traditionally been one step behind the FPS genre in terms of graphical quality. But that's not the only way that *Bloodlines* is hoping to best its competitors – another advantage is the ease with which it allows players to customise their gameplay experience. The game features all seven authentic Masquerade clans from which to choose, so even something as simple as picking a character can have a massive effect on how you have to approach the game's missions.

Each clan has its own strengths and weaknesses, which in turn means you have to adapt your style of play to suit each situation. Playing as the violent Brujah, for example, makes you better suited to facing enemies head-on; the elegant Toreador is more adept at talking their way out of situations with persuasion; and the hideous Nosferatu would have you sticking to the shadows to take advantage of their stealth abilities.

"The ability to… be the vampire of your own choosing is a big deal for us," says Lyman. "Whether you're the more social, seductive, 'imposing your will upon others' kind of vampire, the hideous creature who skulks around in the shadows, or just the feral killing machine who transforms and grows claws – every one of those is a valid path through the game. You can still play against type, though – the clans are more a basic template than a straitjacket that restricts what you do."

And it's this freedom of choice that gives us hope for *Bloodlines*. Just as *Invisible War* gave you more than enough chances to shape your destiny, so *Bloodlines* allows you to explore the world as you see fit and become the vampire you want to be. Set across four massive hub areas – Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Hollywood and Chinatown – and with an extensive story arc that changes depending on how you play, there's more than enough potential in *Bloodlines* to make it a great game.

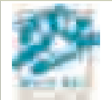
NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

While fans will lap up the latest videogame outing for the *Vampire* series, Troika is keen to point out that the game is designed with devotees *and* absolute beginners in mind. The game's relatively simple interface and attribute system are easy enough for even the most clueless *Vampire* player to grasp. However, gamers who are already familiar with the *Vampire* universe will find every possible feature at their disposal, right down to the stat-covered character sheet that every player needs. It's this integration of the in-depth *Vampire* concept into a relatively simple FPS-style game that helps make *Bloodlines* accessible, without alienating hardcore fans.

"MIXING THE VAMPIRE SERIES WITH AN FPS FORMULA MEANS BLOODLINES CAN BE AS SIMPLE OR COMPLEX AS YOU WANT"

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

PC



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Formed in 1991, White Wolf Publishing was established with the aim of redefining the art of storytelling. Constantly stretching the boundaries of artistic entertainment through the horror, sci-fi and fantasy genres, the company has expanded from its base of role-playing and mass-market fiction to encompass videogames, television and cinema.

HISTORY

- **MAGE: THE ASCENSION** 2000 [N/A]
- **WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE** 2000 [N/A]
- **VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE** 1998 [N/A]

■ The Nosferatu are particularly hideous beasts, so it's best to stay in the shadows if you decide to play as one of them.

■ Pretty she may be, but you want to be careful of who you talk to in darkened clubs – you never know who might be listening.

■ Being an unstoppable vampire-killing machine is all very well, but there's something to be said for the more subtle approach.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SOMETHING TO GET YOUR TEETH INTO

HALF-LIFE 2 + DEUS EX x VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE = V: TM – BLOODLINES

"THE HALF-LIFE 2 ENGINE IS VERY MUCH GEARED TOWARDS FIRST-PERSON GAMEPLAY, AND WE LOVE THAT BECAUSE IT'S SO IMMEDIATE"

LEONARD BOYARSKY, CEO, TROIKA GAMES

SMASH COURT TENNIS PRO TOURNAMENT 2



Character models (and visuals in general) are much better than just about any other PS2 tennis game.

There are plenty of mini-games and training exercises to keep you constantly occupied.

CAN NAMCO SMASH TOP SPIN'S (F)ACE IN?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Sport
PLAYERS: 1-4

Tennis action with a twist courtesy of those clever chaps at Namco, the firm that game us the delightful *Anna Kournikova's Smash Court Tennis*. The clue's in the name…

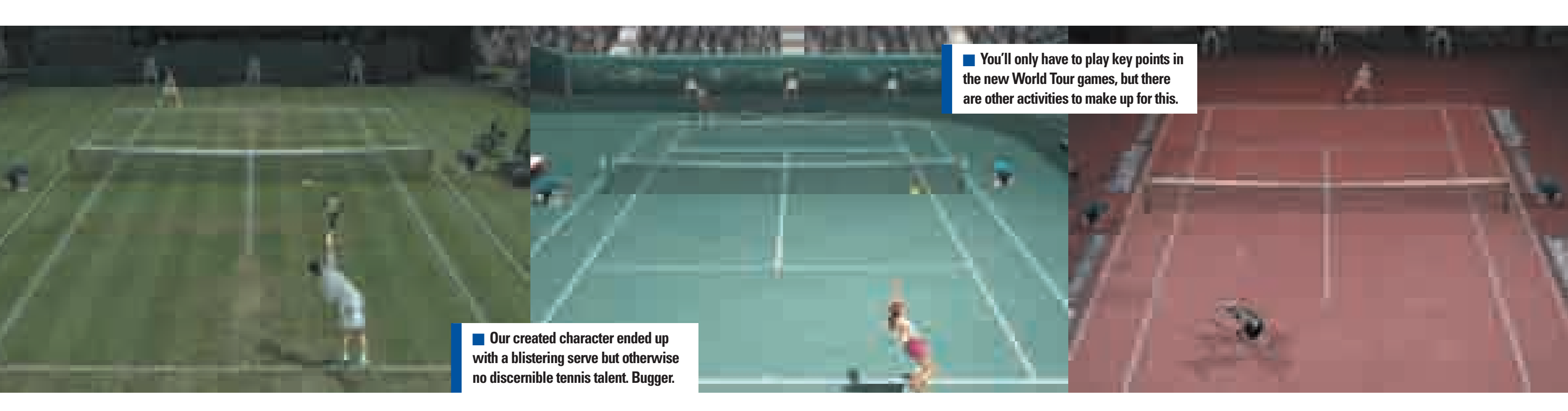
Within the many rules, regulations and traditions of competitive sport, there is only so far you can push the boundaries before the game falls into a dangerous middle territory between reality and make-believe. Poor sales of the massively enjoyable *SEGA Soccer Slam* are testament to this, and while we did spend an awful lot of time playing Bomb Tennis back in the PSone heyday of the *Smash Court* series, the slight change of tack towards realism for this PS2 update is an inevitable but no less bitter pill to swallow.

To confuse matters further, Namco has decided to toy with structure and action rather than rules and visuals, so this is looking as good as we could hope even if the music is a touch, well, offensive. But innovation in a tennis game? Surely not, but Namco seems intent on proving the world wrong with a series of bizarre yet innovative changes to the traditional tennis recipe. The most notable is a massive swing in the direction of the series – those that remember the super-deformed arcade glory of the series' PSone origins may not like the fact that evolution has turned Namco's smash-'em-up into a much more realistic affair. This means that *Smash Court 2* (bizarrely, the fourth game in the series) is nowhere near as pick-up-and-playable as its forerunners or even SEGA's superb *Virtua Tennis* duo, but in the trade-off it gains the depth and challenge to contend with the likes of *Top Spin*.

The biggest change, which has evoked a mixed response from us and is likely to do the same among punters, concerns the way the World Tour mode is played. Rather than the usual 'play until you win' tourneys, a lot of the games that you take part in are CPU-determined until a pivotal event in the set. At this point, you're dropped in on the action and need to win the game (and preferably complete the bonus 'mission' you're set) in order to ensure future success. This makes progression far quicker but reduces the sense of involvement in victory and thus its sense of reward, but thanks to the many training regimes and bonus experience points granted by missions, you're able to upgrade your player's skills in a whole host of the usual areas.

With only the significantly different *Virtua Tennis 2* as competition on PlayStation2, it looks as though *Smash Court 2* could have a definite market with the right promotion. *Top Spin*'s crown will face its strongest challenger yet this summer.

"IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR TENNIS WITH A DIFFERENCE, SMASH COURT 2 SHOULD BE A SAFE BET"



You'll only have to play key points in the new World Tour games, but there are other activities to make up for this.

Our created character ended up with a blistering serve but otherwise no discernible tennis talent. Bugger.


eMag

TALES OF SYMPHONIA



"THE LINE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL BLURS IN THIS IMMERSIVE, EMOTIONALLY CHARGED EPIC ADVENTURE"
NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

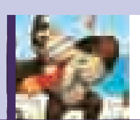
THE HARD CEL

WIND WAKER + CHRONO TRIGGER + NAMCO INTROS = TALES OF SYMPHONIA

■ Some things in RPGs will never change, will they?

■ Battles are all about pulling off massive chain combos.

■ Cel-shading is nothing new but its use here is really rather effective.



COMPANY PROFILE

Namco is responsible for famous gaming icons and franchises such as *Pac-Man*, *Tekken*, *Soul Calibur*, *Ridge Racer*, *Ace Combat* and *Moto GP*. Its strong arcade presence of the Nineties has dwindled somewhat, with the company focusing instead on multiformat releases and collaborations such as *Donkey Konga* and *Star Fox 2*.

HISTORY

- **DONKEY KONGA** 2003 [GameCube]
- **SOUL CALIBUR II** 2003 [Multiformat]
- **TEKKEN** 1994 [PSone]



There's no word on a PAL release yet, so prepare to wait…

Enemies appear on the world map and can be avoided.

THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF GAMECUBE TALES TITLES. BUT CEL-SHADING? COME ON…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out now, US: 31 July)
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

The long-standing *Tales* series of RPGs follows Link's lead and comes to the GameCube courtesy of a little cel-shading.

To the regular gamer it might seem a bit strange that one of Japan's leading videogames publishers is spending such a significant chunk of time and resources on a format that is constantly battling to stay in second place. And considering the massive falling out that Namco and Nintendo had back in the early Nineties it's even more surprising. But the truth is that the two Ns have kissed, made up, and are now snugly tucked up in bed together. Namco recently attributed part of its positive quarterly results to none other than the exclusive GameCube RPG *Baten Kaitos*, so it'll come as less of a shock that fellow exclusive RPG *Tales Of Symphonia* is getting an English-language conversion.

The *Tales* series is huge in Japan, having been in existence since we were in nappies. It's had many an accolade over the years (including being the first RPG to feature full speech on a 256Mb SNES cartridge), and the GameCube iteration's selling point is that it's cel-shaded. Okay, it's not much of a selling point in itself but we have to admit that the way in which the team has used the graphical style is very appealing. As with *Wind Waker*, we couldn't imagine the game working as well with any other style.

The game has been out in Japan since August 2002, and its success is almost completely down to the refreshing combat system. Firstly, you can choose to fight enemies instead of randomly falling into an unwanted battle. Opponents appear on the isometric 3D world map meaning that you can avoid them if you want, but in true RPG fashion you won't grow up to be big and strong if you don't eat your greens… er, battle your monsters. Once you're in a fight you're in complete control of your characters. The analogue stick moves your character round the battle arena, while the shoulder buttons let you choose targets and dodge attacks. The controller's face buttons are your main attack buttons, while the C-stick allows you to pull off special moves à la *Capcom Vs SNK: EO*.

Four players can take part, each controlling their own character and racking up the combos. The basic idea is to string together massive combos in order to a) defeat your enemy, and b) score highly at the end of the battle. Indeed, the outcome of the battle isn't down to if you beat the enemy, but how you do it. The size of your combos, the amount of damage you take, the number of blocks you perform… it all contributes towards your score and reward type at the end of the battle.

At the moment we can't tell you anything about the storyline other than it's a typical 'good versus evil' adventure. The Japanese version is obviously quite confusing, and Namco US has yet to release any details. We expect E3 to offer a fully playable English-language version, but something that is still up in the air is the PAL release. Hopefully either EA or Nintendo itself will pick up the title for release in Europe, but we wouldn't expect to see it until the end of the year. We'll bring you more updates once the US version arrives in the office in a few short months. In the meantime, if someone could remind us where we left the Japanese phrasebook…

DON'T BE A DIV

For too long now developers have blamed the GameCube discs' limited storage capacity for low-quality cut-scenes and FMV, but Namco (as Factor 5 has done) has proven them all wrong. *Tales Of Symphonia* features an extensive anime intro recorded at full quality. Aside from being very impressive in itself, it makes a mockery of those developers who release GameCube versions of their games with inferior cut-scenes. Namco attributes the inclusion of this cut-scene to the compression capabilities of DivX. The intro is typical Namco fare, introducing you to the aggressive-yet-sensitive sides of each character. Just what you need, right?

> "THIS GAME'S SELLING POINT IS ITS CEL-SHADING. THAT'S NOT MUCH IN ITSELF, BUT THE WAY IT'S BEEN USED IS VERY APPEALING"

OBSCURE



Double the firepower, half the time it takes to get rid of mutants such as this one.

Working in a team will be paramount to your survival – life will be easier if you keep all five members alive.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST? NOT ANY MORE, AS GROUP LOVE INVADES HORROR

PS2 **It's hardly a secret that survival horror games live and die by their atmosphere.** Whether it's zombie dogs crashing through windows, or the tension of being stalked by an unknown monster that you've yet to see, the fear of the unknown is responsible for the frights. Innovations such as *Forbidden Siren*'s sightjacking or *Project Zero*'s camera elevated their respective games into areas that were unpredictable and unsettling, and therefore scary. However, with the genre becoming dangerously oversubscribed the shocks are dying down as gamers are quickly learning what clichés to expect. How can there be fear of the unknown if everything is already known?

Obscure is the latest addition to the survival horror stable and publisher Microïds has embellished it with a bloated 'action adventure survival horror' description. Turgid genre explanations aside, the story will hopefully put some of the bite back into survival horror's bark. Five teenagers are trapped in a sinister school and they soon discover the students have been the subjects of their teachers' experiments. While sounding as though it's been lifted straight from a jokey teen horror movie (*cough* *The Faculty* *cough*), the storyline will provide a different angle on the usual survival horror fare, as it focuses on the group's fate rather than concentrating on a central protagonist.

It's not just the plot that ventures into new ground because the gameplay seems to have benefited from this fresh storyline angle too. You'll be able to switch between the five teenagers at any point during the game, which will no doubt lend itself to some puzzles along the way (the long-established poser of helping your partner reach a higher ledge, for instance). The need to team up for defeating monsters should also be important as you work in groups to overcome the horrors inside the school, improving your chance of survival.

Of course, *Obscure* won't be the first group-based survival horror title to hit the shelves – that honour goes to *Resident Evil: Outbreak* – but it's still a step in the right direction for survival horror games. This title should introduce new gameplay dynamics into a faltering genre and its success will probably rely on how well the character switching is integrated.

Despite having such a low profile, *Obscure* is showing a lot of promise with the moody lighting and polished graphics already demanding to be noticed. With multiplayer rumours growing louder too, you wouldn't blame *Resident Evil: Outbreak* for having a few sleepless nights…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Microïds
DEVELOPER: Hydravision
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1-2

Teen survival horror plot fused with teen survival horror gameplay, with an added teamplay slant to keep the formula fresh.

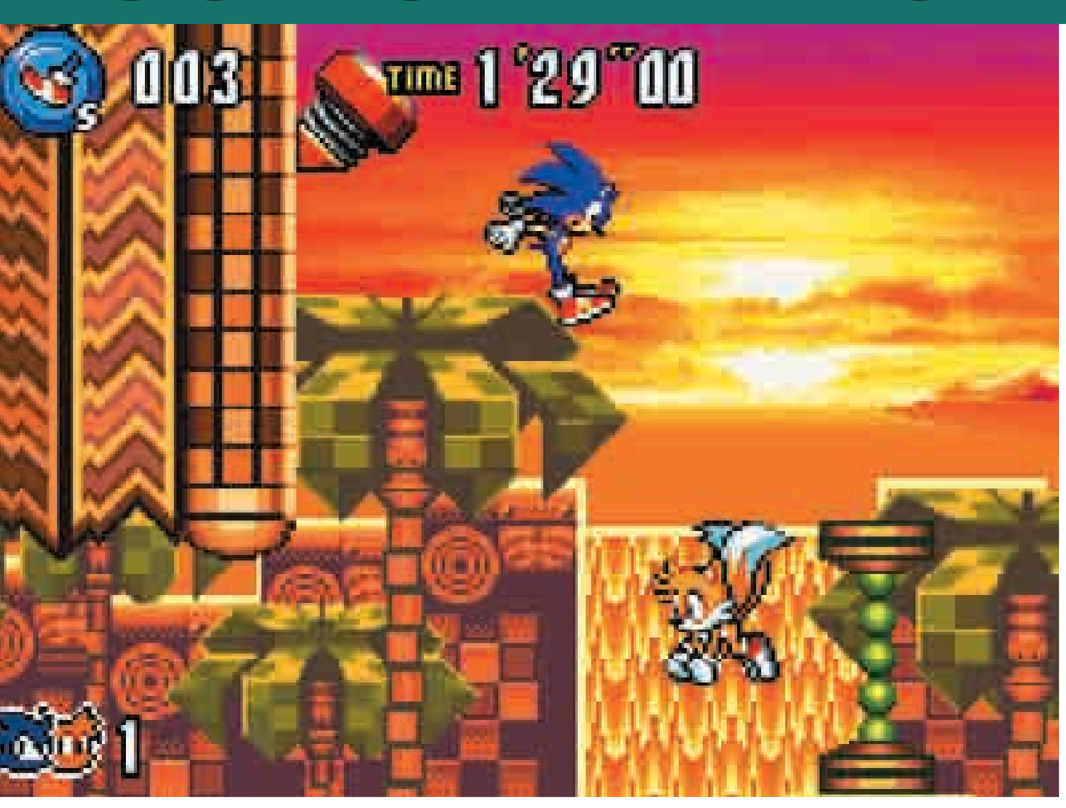
"THE STORYLINE FOCUSES ON THE GROUP'S FATE RATHER THAN CONCENTRATING ON ONE PROTAGONIST"



Resident Evil anyone? The camera angle is undoubtedly familiar but switching characters will provide the USP.


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SONIC ADVANCE 3



ROOM IN YOUR BURROW FOR ONE MORE?

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: June
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1-2

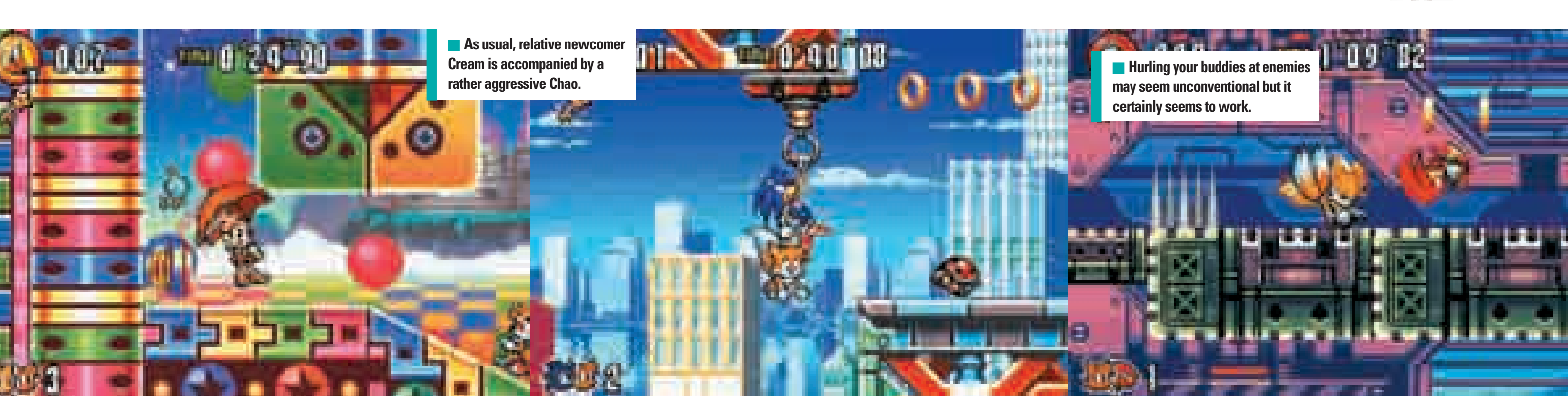
■ After the twin disappointments of *Heroes* and the nightmarish *Battle*, Sonic goes back to doing what he does best – running with some pace from left to right.

> "AFTER WORRYING US WITH THE TEAMWORK ASPECT, SONIC MAKES AMENDS WITH HIS OLD-SCHOOL SENSIBILITIES"

Why doesn't anyone understand that *Sonic* games simply don't work in 3D? While the next-gen consoles have been forced to run polygonal letdowns, the less powerful handhelds have housed much more traditional titles which, to this day, are truer to the hog's roots than any into-the-screen affair could ever be. This third GBA outing for SEGA's mascot is firmly grounded in traditional *Sonic* themes – high-speed negotiation of loops, jumps and corkscrews – with many of the newer ideas from its bigger brothers, such as the teamwork aspect of *Sonic Heroes*. Hub-based levels and remixes of familiar tunes abound as you progress through an impressive number of stages and we've already encountered some fantastic bosses that remind us what the series is all about. Question is, will these elements push the adventure too far into hazardous territory?

On one hand, the twin character feature is a glimpse at what *Heroes* could have offered and is genuinely useful at times, even if it does stray from the traditional *Sonic* formula. It allows you to call in your CPU partner with the R button and abuse their unique talents to your heart's content – get Tails to carry you to a higher ledge or hitch a glide on Knuckles' back. Of course, this can take its toll on level design but levels are mostly structured well enough to facilitate whatever team you choose. Aside from the new abilities, this is probably the closest anything has come (level design-wise, at least) to the Mega Drive games that kick-started the blue hedgehog's illustrious career; no bad thing by us.

On the other hand, *Sonic Advance 3* often treads a dangerous path. Many areas are even more confusing than the previous game, the later levels of which were like mazes, and there are numerous places where loops or springs need to be used several times to grant access to higher or lower paths. This is the only real drawback in what is otherwise promising to be a sound title. So long as the later stages don't replace the thrill of success and speed with the false exhilaration of hundreds of loops and 'hyper-cool skillz', we'll be welcoming the fallen hero back to our GBAs with open arms.

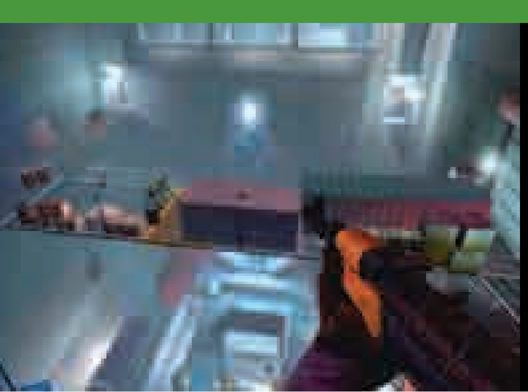


■ As usual, relative newcomer Cream is accompanied by a rather aggressive Chao.

■ Hurling your buddies at enemies may seem unconventional but it certainly seems to work.


eMag

SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY





■ *Shadow Ops*' portrayal of war is one of the most realistic we've seen.

THINK YOU'VE HAD IT TOUGH? YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Zombie
RELEASE: June '04
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-16 online)

■ Don't be fooled by its first-person perspective; *Shadow Ops* aims to bring much more to the table than more traditional shooters.

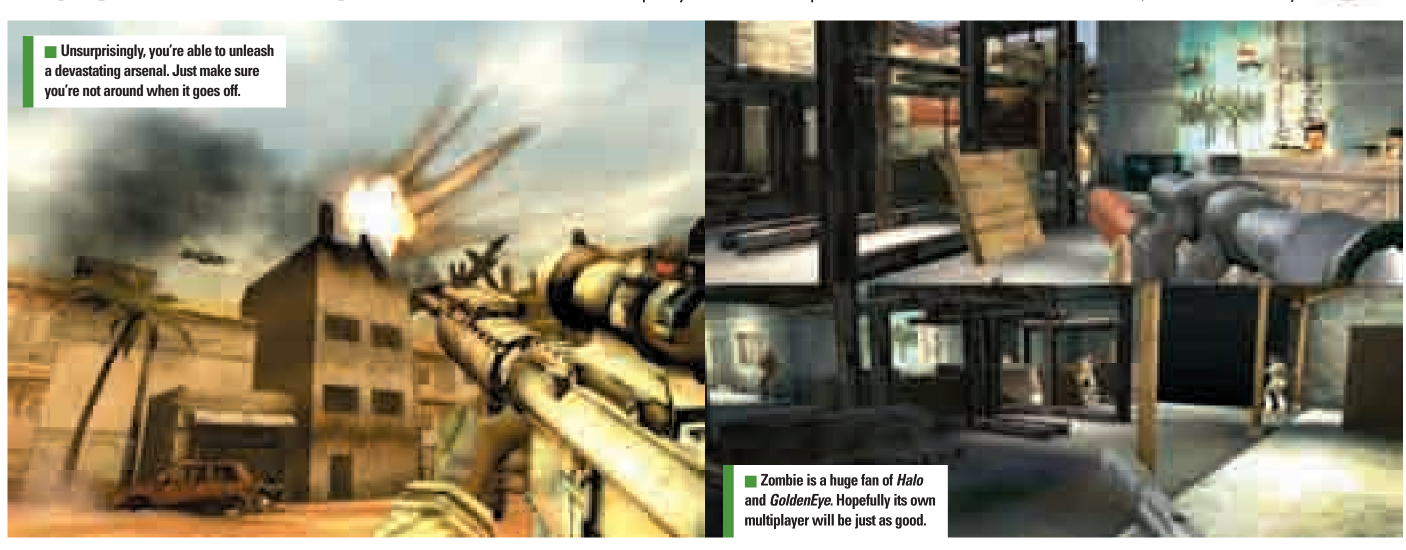
If you're the type of gamer who enjoys being led by the hand through the first few levels of a game, you're in for a nasty shock. No sooner has Zombie's latest title started than you're immediately plunged into carnage that will have you blubbing like a berated child. Wanting to capture the essence of being in a war zone, *Shadow Ops* does away with tutorials and throws you in at the deep end. The result is akin to that first harrowing viewing of *Saving Private Ryan*; soldiers drop like flies around you, helicopters spiral out of control in the skies above, and explosions create a terrifyingly chaotic atmosphere.

Of course, while Zombie should be commended for taking a brave new approach to a far from original genre, we're not too sure if it will be able to sustain this innovation throughout the rest of the game's 20 levels. At the moment, though, impressions are extremely favourable, with campaigns visiting locations from the snowy wastes of Siberia to the verdant jungles of the African Congo. The environments are realistic and feature impressive lighting and a phenomenal amount of detail – just what you'd expect from a game that's using an enhanced version of *Unreal 2004*'s game engine.

Not surprisingly for a title that features so much on-screen carnage, ragdoll physics feature heavily, with the Karma engine ensuring that every death will have you wincing as the latest body flies through the air and lands in an undignified heap at your feet. An impressive arsenal of weaponry has been expertly sound captured and this further enhances *Shadow Ops*' realism. Whether you're listening to an unfortunate opponent being riddled with sub-machine-gun fire, or taking cover from a launched rocket's fallout, the atmosphere is terrifyingly accurate and perfectly captured by the Xbox's 5.1 digital sound.

Of course, all this would be for naught if Zombie didn't have a game to back up the aesthetics, so you'll be pleased to hear that *Shadow Ops* features more than its fair share of gameplay modes. The Campaign mode is perfectly supplemented by a completely standalone co-operative game and there are more Xbox Live options than you can shake an assault rifle at. As it stands, *Shadow Ops* looks like a welcome alternative to *Rainbow Six 3* and should appeal to those who like their action fast, frantic and deadly.

"SHADOW OPS' FIRST LEVEL THROWS YOU INTO ONE OF THE MOST TERRIFYING OPENING ACTS WE'VE EVER SEEN"



■ Unsurprisingly, you're able to unleash a devastating arsenal. Just make sure you're not around when it goes off.

■ Zombie is a huge fan of *Halo* and *GoldenEye*. Hopefully its own multiplayer will be just as good.


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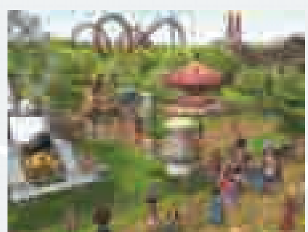
SHOWCASE

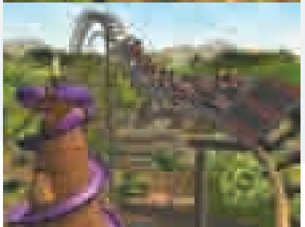
MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

BACK ON THE RAILS

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Frontier
Genre: Management
Players: 1





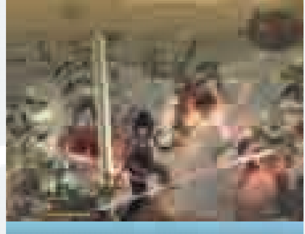
After the disappointing lack of innovation shown by the first full sequel in Atari's *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, not to mention the lacklustre expansion packs that soon followed, we were left wondering how much more coaster-crafting goodness the concept had left to offer. Thankfully, a mere glance at the glorious early screens of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* reveals that the original isometric framework has finally undergone a lavish 3D overhaul and hints that the game could well be making a welcome return to form. Although we recall Bullfrog's *Theme Park* making something of an abysmal transition to 3D, we've every confidence Atari's series cornerstone Chris Sawyer will keep *RCT3* firmly on the right track.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Drakengard

ONE MAN AND HIS DRAGON

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: Cavia
Genre: Action
Players: 1





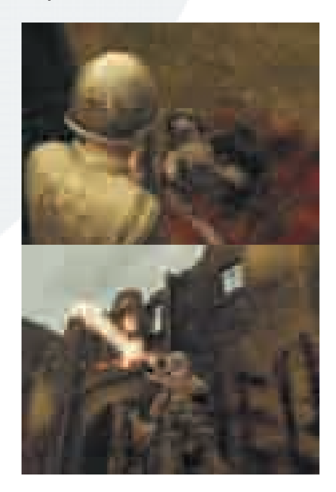
Published in Japan by RPG specialist Square Enix under the name *Drag-On Dragoon*, genre-blurring adventure *Drakengard* does contain a number of role-playing elements but is essentially a feast of third-person action. Following the travels of warrior Kyme and the dragon to which his spirit is tied (it's a long story…) gameplay is split between on-foot hack 'n' slash combat and airborne dogfights aboard Kyme's dragon. The fast-paced melee action accounts for the majority of play and bears more than a passing resemblance to the combo-heavy skirmishes of Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series, while a separate engine is used to bring the flight sequences to life in a style not entirely dissimilar to SEGA's *Panzer Dragoon Orta*.

RELEASE DATE: 21 MAY

ShellShock: Nam '67

YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THE NAM

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox, PC
Origin: Holland
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Guerrilla
Genre: Action
Players: 1





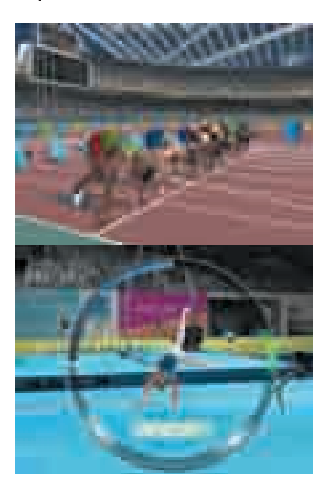
Guerilla – best known for its hotly anticipated *Killzone* project, scheduled to hit the PS2 later this year – turns both its attentions and cutting-edge graphics technology to the battlefields of Sixties Vietnam in what promises to be one of the most deliciously controversial games yet to portray the conflict. Taking the role of a naïve young recruit embarking on his first tour of duty in the ravaged jungles, players are invited to experience the full horror of war complete with gut-wrenching atrocities and unflinchingly fierce levels of brutality. Billed as being closer to the real thing than any of its peers, battle lines are being drawn between the censors and shock-thirsty gamers as we speak.

RELEASE DATE: June '04

Athens 2004

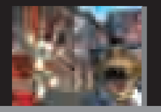
GOING FOR GOLD

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Eurocom
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



Once every four years we become strangely engrossed in a number of sports we couldn't care less about the rest of the time, so it comes as no surprise that our sudden desire to stage a console-based version of the Olympics is once again being catered for by an official PS2 tie-in. Set to appear on the shelves just before the Games begin for real in August, proven UK developer Eurocom is working in close collaboration with the Athens 2004 Organising Committee to bring us the most authentic recreation of the featured events possible. You'll be able to make Britain's unlikely bid for gold in a host of track and field disciplines, along with an array of aquatic, gymnastic, weightlifting, shooting and equestrian events.

RELEASE DATE: July '04



Canned – Sam & Max: Freelance Police [Xbox, PC]

■ **The gaming world was dealt a hefty blow when LucasArts announced that the follow-up to one of the greatest adventure titles ever devised has joined the similarly anticipated new *Full Throttle* game in the reject pile.**



Canned – Mythica [PC]

■ **Microsoft Game Studios has pulled the plug on persistent online RPG *Mythica*, citing an overcrowded market and other MMORPGs in the pipeline as reasons for the cancellation.**

England International Football

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



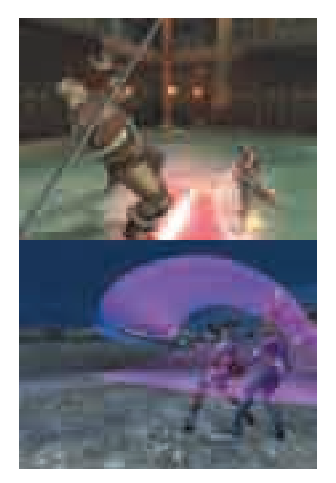
In anticipation of this summer's European Championships in Portugal, Codemasters has secured the rights to produce an officially endorsed England team game. Promising to improve on last year's rather flawed *Club Football* engine in every area of the park, *England International Football*'s play is set to feature faster, more intuitive fluidity. The game offers photorealistic likenesses of 25 members of the England squad along with a virtual Sven commanding the troops from the touchline, while commentary comes courtesy of Barry Davies and Gary Lineker. Perhaps most intriguing, however, is the prospect of online co-op and versus play for Xbox owners, making it the first footie title playable over Xbox Live.

RELEASE DATE: May '04

Iron Phoenix

MADE IN TAIWAN

Format: Xbox
Origin: Taiwan
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Developer: InterServ
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1-16 Online



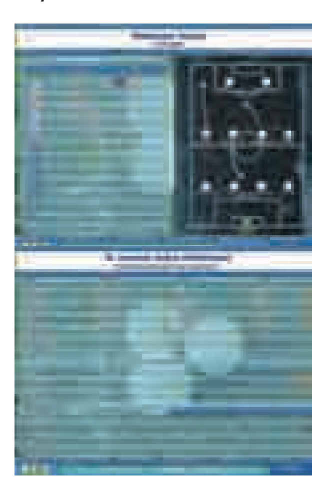
While Sammy is alleging its forthcoming team-based beat-'em-up invents a new genre of online gaming, we're expecting the enticing weapons-based combat to play out something like the epic 16-player Lightsaber battles featured in LucasArts' *Jedi Knight* series. The multiplayer skirmish modes will adhere to the traditional online FPS templates, but rather than repeatedly meeting your demise courtesy of a single bullet from a hidden sniper, the action will involve much more skilled hand-to-hand encounters between combatants. Away from these focal battles over Xbox Live, a single-player campaign enables players to hone their skills in a quest to recover nine magical weapons forged from the shards of a fallen meteor.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Championship Manager 5

REINVENTING THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Beautiful Game Studios
Genre: Sports Management
Players: 1-TBA



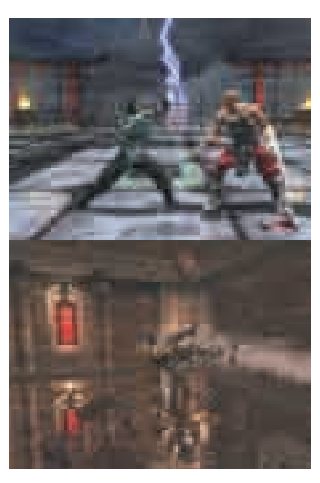
With developer Sports Interactive no longer on Eidos' books, newly formed Beautiful Game Studios faces the colossal task of maintaining the standards set by previous *Champ Manager* games. Off the pitch things look very promising for the rookie studio, with the PFS's worldwide network of professional scouts being employed to produce a highly accurate player database, while early indications of the game as a whole suggest many similarities with SI's masterpiece. The proof of the pudding will ultimately be in how authentically the match engine puts our meticulously considered tactics into action, but Eidos is promising the new *CM5* engine will improve on its predecessors.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Mortal Kombat: Deception

MIDWAY GETS BACK INTO THE RING

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-House
Genre: Fighting
Players: 1-2

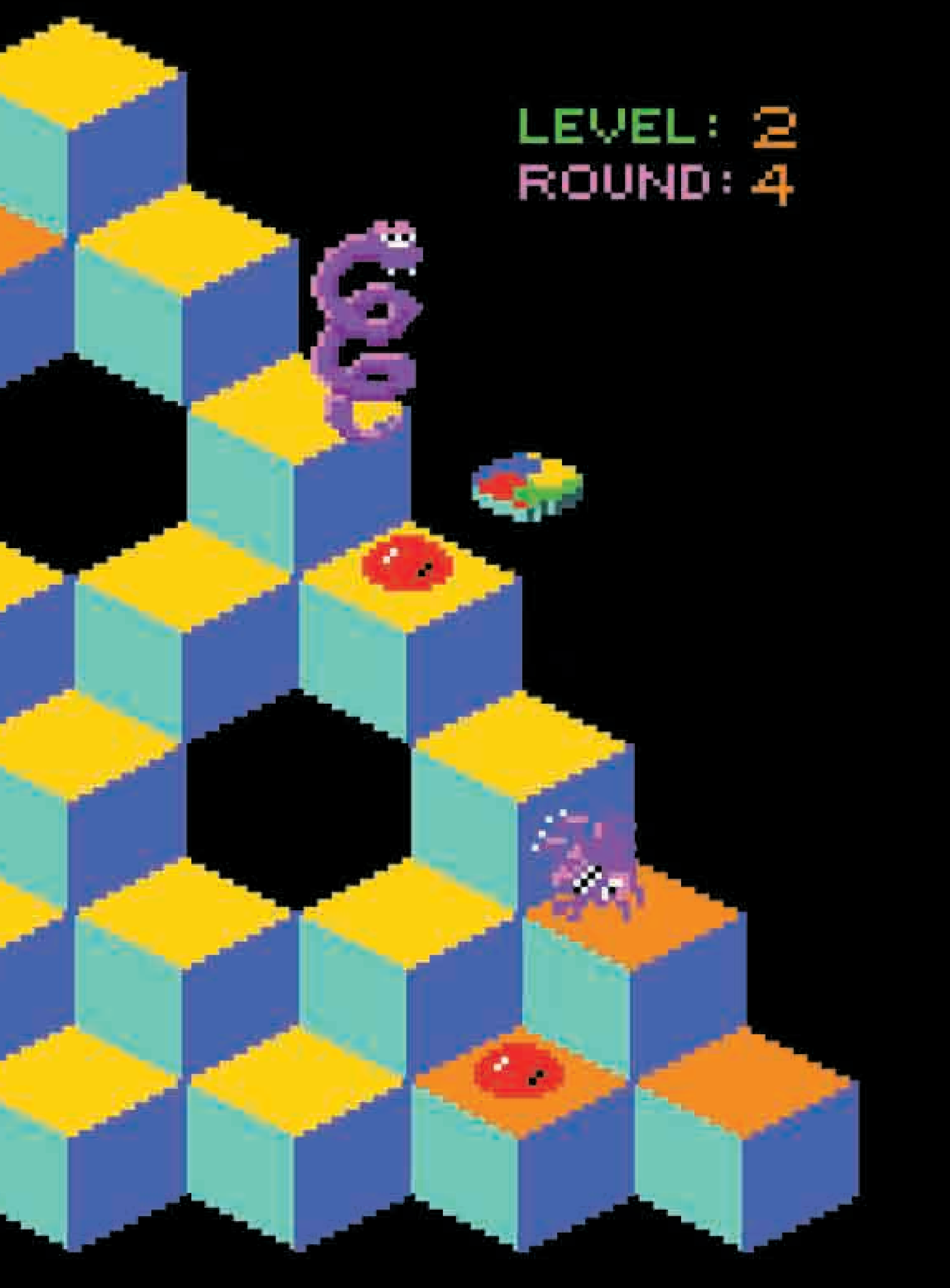


Twelve years since *Mortal Kombat* first took the world by storm with its gratuitous levels of violence and gory fatality moves, Midway's flagship fighting series is still going strong. While it takes more than a few splashes of claret to impress today's discerning gamer, Midway has continually evolved and refined the series' gameplay to remain a serious contender in the genre. Few details have emerged about forthcoming blood-fest *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, but the multi-tiered backgrounds look set to introduce new levels of environmental interactivity – including a variety of elaborate scenery-based fatalities – while a selection of mini-games will provide some light relief from the core carnage.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04



"Ooh, no need to be rude, dear" **Q*Bert Arcade [Gottlieb] 1982**


LEVEL: 2
ROUND: 4

Acce all Ga

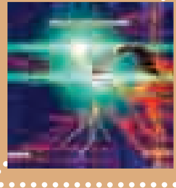
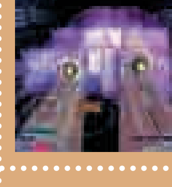
Going in search of enlightenment, we explore the overlooked world of accessible gaming

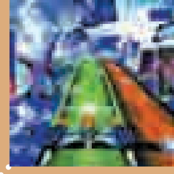
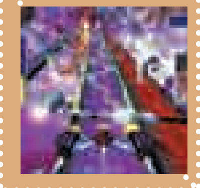
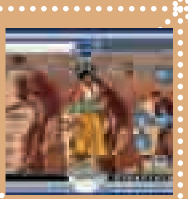
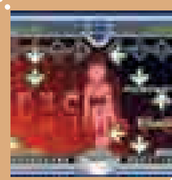
Experiencing *Metroid Prime* without any audio or visual input whatsoever would be otherwordly, certainly, but perhaps not in the way the developers intended. Everything would be less tactile, less organic; the illusion would be shattered and the immersive first-person atmosphere pioneered by *Doom* would be conspicuous by its absence. There'd be cold and clinical in place of warm and encouraging, and Nintendo's glorious update would no longer be so uniquely rewarding. Crucially, if the visuals were lost or obscured Samus would be up to her knees in acid in no time.

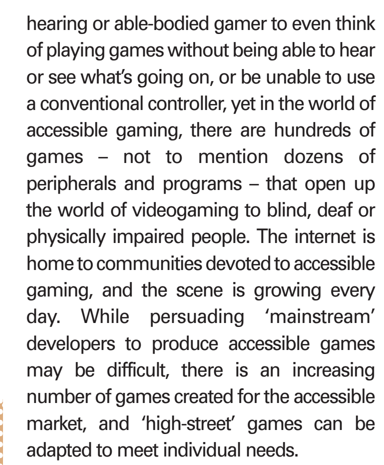
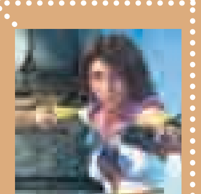
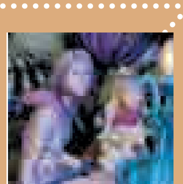
A lack of graphical or sound effects would be the death-knell for many games not because it somehow deadens the gameplaying experience, but because it would eliminate the point of playing videogames: that wonderful audio/visual/tactile amalgam of sensory stimulation that immerses the player. Arguably, the audio and visual elements are two-thirds of the gaming experience and bring a huge amount to a videogame, but for gamers with impaired sight or hearing, what is visible or audible is even more crucial.

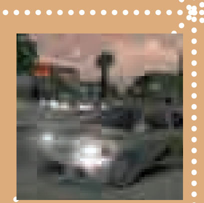
It may seem impossible to a sighted, hearing or able-bodied gamer to even think of playing games without being able to hear or see what's going on, or be unable to use a conventional controller, yet in the world of accessible gaming, there are hundreds of games – not to mention dozens of peripherals and programs – that open up the world of videogaming to blind, deaf or physically impaired people. The internet is home to communities devoted to accessible gaming, and the scene is growing every day. While persuading 'mainstream' developers to produce accessible games may be difficult, there is an increasing number of games created for the accessible market, and 'high-street' games can be adapted to meet individual needs.

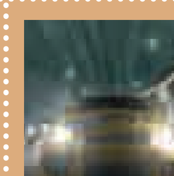
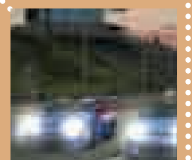
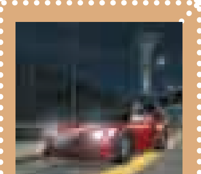
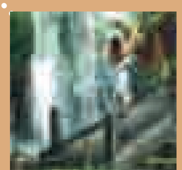
Michael Feir, former editor of *Audyssey*

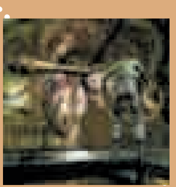






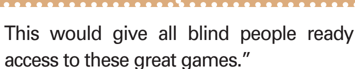








magazine – a quarterly publication for blind and partially sighted gamers – is blind and has been since birth, and enjoys playing a range of videogames. "Turn-based text adventures allow me to put myself mentally into situations," says Feir, "For example, escaping a room filling up with water by finding out how to pry off a ceiling panel with a crowbar. In reality, I'd have very little chance of finding out where a crowbar was lying – these details could be taken in very quickly by someone who had full sight." Feir is able to play text adventures using a Braille display which turns the text on the screen into Braille characters, though there also screen-reading speech programs that PC gamers can use to turn text into an audio commentary. Sadly, these aren't foolproof. "There can sometimes be problems reviewing the last paragraph of text resulting from the last move made," says Reid of text adventures. "I'm hopeful that a speech-enabled interpreter will one day be created which can speak any new text that appears independent of the screen reader. This would give all blind people ready access to these great games."

Advances in technology have meant that the pace of blind and visually impared (BVI) gaming has picked up in recent years, and different genres are now represented. ESP Softworks, which is a major developer of accessible games, is currently working on a driving title, while GMA games has produced a submarine simulator (*Lone Wolf*) and has nearly finished a tank game. One of the main reasons these genres have opened up is through clever use of directional sound or particular noises that mean that gamers who can't see what's on screen can instead immerse themselves in sound. "The advent of sound-based games has opened even more doors to us," says Feir, "We can now face off against hordes of aliens, mutant monsters and other enemies using ear-hand co-ordination."

For gamers who are unable to hear sound effects and soundtracks, the gaming experience can be just as limited as if their vision was restricted. And, contrary to being helped by modern gaming technology, they can miss out because of it. Reid Kimball suffers some hearing loss and is a level designer at Ritual Entertainment in Dallas, Texas. He's

MAKING GAMING EASIER

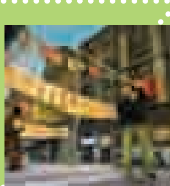
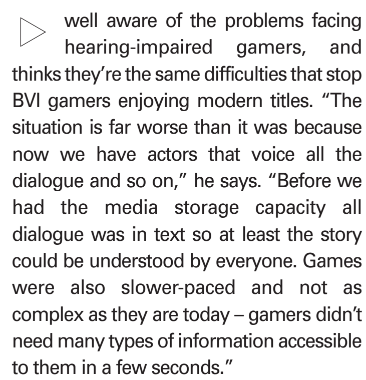
There is a range of software and hardware that's been designed with accessible gaming in mind. Primarily aimed at either blind or physically impaired gamers, adaptive software can act as a link to regular programs and games. Jaws for Windows (freedomscientific.com) is a screen-reading program, while Window-Eyes (gwmicro.com) turns Windows text into speech. For gamers with limited mobility, Game Commander (gamecommander.com) is a voice-recognition engine that's compatible with various voice chat programs. The Claw (claw.com.au) is a moulded mouse with extra buttons that can be assigned keyboard functions, which can be helpful for people who have problems with hand flexibility.

The net is also home to many suppliers of accessible games, some of whom are companies, while other titles are coded by disabled gamers who want titles that meet their specific needs. Most games, such as *Kchess* (a chess game from arkangles.com) and *Dynaman, Change Reaction, Alien Outback, ESP Pinball* and *Monkey Business* (all at adoraentertainment.com), are for blind or visually-impaired gamers. However, some titles – like *Alien Invasion* (a *Space Invaders* clone), *Brickout* (a *Breakout* copycat) and *Ruby Ridge* (a skating platformer), which are all at arcess.com – are not only low-vision-friendly, but their speed can be adjusted to aid gamers with a physical impairment. And this is a just a tiny sample of the games available…





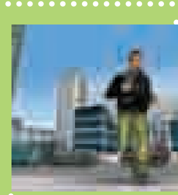


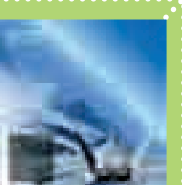




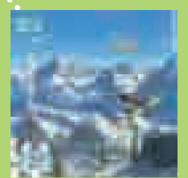
well aware of the problems facing hearing-impaired gamers, and thinks they're the same difficulties that stop BVI gamers enjoying modern titles. "The situation is far worse than it was because now we have actors that voice all the dialogue and so on," he says. "Before we had the media storage capacity all dialogue was in text so at least the story could be understood by everyone. Games were also slower-paced and not as complex as they are today – gamers didn't need many types of information accessible to them in a few seconds."

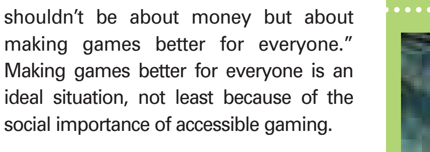
Whereas the PC is home to most of the titles developed for blind gamers, deaf gamers find consoles more suited to their needs. Vibrating joypads provide valuable sensory feedback, although it's not always in the most helpful way as it is "usually focused only on what happens to the player, rather than vibrating because of the sound of a gun being fired nearby," according to Kimball. Ultimately, Kimball believes that none of the current gaming platforms adequately meet the requirements of accessible gaming, though this isn't necessarily the fault of the console manufacturers. "I think the solution lies in the developers' software instead of hardware," he says.

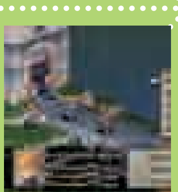
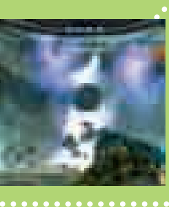
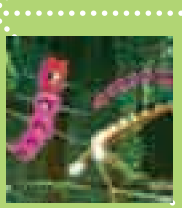
Sadly, of all the developers and publishers approached for this article, none were able (or willing) to comment. Is this indicative of their unwillingness to address the needs of the accessible gaming community? Kimball seems to think so: "I think the real improvements will come from research, educational or independent developers because publishers feel like they are wasting valuable money if they pay for the development of games that cater to disabled gamers," he says. "They don't see the money in it and don't realise it shouldn't be about money but about making games better for everyone." Making games better for everyone is an ideal situation, not least because of the social importance of accessible gaming.



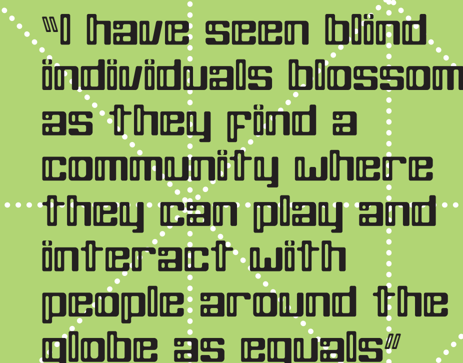


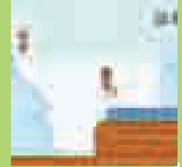
Gaming for all

As well as spurring the creation of net-based communities, accessible gaming allows BVI, deaf or physically impaired children and adults to enhance their skills, learn new abilities, and make new friends. Paul Silva, co-founder and lead designer of AllinPlay, a company making games for BVI gamers, has experienced games that have helped blind children improve their spelling, maths and social skills. "I have seen BVI individuals who have been socially isolated for years blossom as they find a community where they can play and interact with people from around the globe, blind and sighted, as equals," he says. Nick Adamson, a blind gamer and programmer of BVI-suited games such the

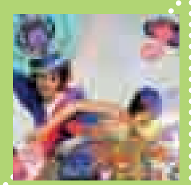


"I have seen blind individuals blossom as they find a community where they can play and interact with people around the globe as equals"
... Paul Silva
















in-progress *Flight Commander* for PC, believes "videogames are not only a great thing for a blind gamer to relax with but they can be used to build confidence and interpersonal skills." He is very much involved with the disabled gamer scene and feels that blind people have historically been protected from interacting with the sighted world and that BVI gaming is not being used to its full potential. "Audio games can be used to increase the sensitivity of a blind person's main sense, and this is why gaming for a blind person is first of all fun, but, subconsciously, has a much deeper impact."

So the argument for videogames as a positive force is a coherent and substantiated one, but gaming means many things to the accessible gaming community on a wealth of psychological and physical levels – even jaded 20-year veteran players subconsciously salivate over the chance to nosemanual their way to fame in the *Tony Hawk's* titles. Clearly, videogaming supplies stimulation on a conscious level equally as much as it provides subconscious pleasure. Gaming can be truly life-affirming for the accessible community – opening up new worlds and new experiences – so it would follow that ergonomic peripherals and quality games are crucial to enjoyment from the perspective of disabled gamers.

The control issue

"Many of the games and social activities that both children and adults engage in are not very blind- and visually impaired-friendly," says Paul Silva. "Many are hungering for a way to be able to play and interact with each other and their sighted friends and families without any feeling of being handicapped." He is concerned that videogames for the disabled aren't accessible enough. "Screen readers and magnifiers are not game peripherals but assistive technology that make computers useable. There is a company in Israel selling a tactile mouse, but I have not seen significant progress with that technology as of yet despite its extremely interesting premise." Nick Adamson further laments the inaccessibility of mass-market games to the BVI gamer: "Currently the accessible games market is purely based on the PC. Force feedback increases the realism of the games and around 50 per cent of gamers will have such a joystick or pad. As for game consoles, they are pointless to blind gamers."

Michael Feir verifies that the PC is the disabled gamer's platform of choice, simply because of the peripherals available. "There is talk... about force feedback devices. *ESP Raceway* will feature support for steering wheels, and a tactile computer mouse made by Virtouch (www.virtouch.com) may also potentially have implications for making games accessible." The question is will there be enough titles to support these devices and make them a worthwhile investment? Even today the PS2 Multitap and the G-Con are not satisfactorily catered for, and the less said about the lack of PSone mouse-compatible software the better.

WHICH WAY TO GO?

With the current state of accessible gaming far from ideal, what would be the best direction for gaming to take to open it up to blind, deaf or physically impaired gamers? For blind gamers particularly, it seems that they play by memorising sequences of moves. This is all very well, but such a technique lends itself much better to the sort of 2D games rarely found on 128-bit platforms but that are flourishing on the GBA (which is not a friendly medium for blind or partially sighted gamers). The increasingly analogue nature of game control and the blossoming of games' scope does not necessarily increase enjoyment for the disabled gamer, so there is still virtue in the dual-plane game – perhaps with an emphasis on sound or vibration feedback. If these elements can be combined, we could be closer to a game that appeals to sighted, blind, hearing and deaf players. If someone can't play, say, the latest photorealistic WWII FPS because they can't distinguish a tank from an ammo depot owing to a universal grey-brownness on-screen, it can severely affect a gamer's enjoyment. Since gaming is all about entertainment, what good is that?

Access all Games

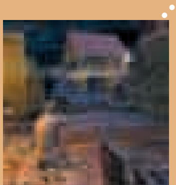
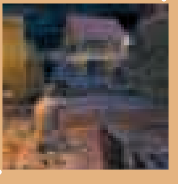
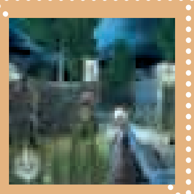
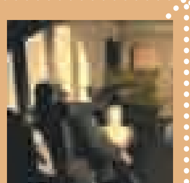
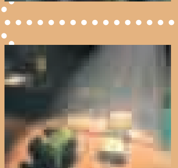
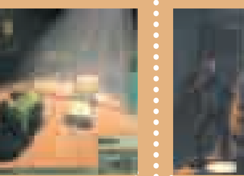
Dr. Sile O'Modhrain, head of the palpable machines group at Media Lab Europe, believes that videogaming "allows young disabled people to participate in an activity that is core to the culture of their peers and, if the interface technologies they use are good enough, allows them to compete as equals, when in so many parts of their lives they can't do this." In an article written for the BBC's Ouch! website, she dispels the myth that games for the disabled fail on an interactive level before lambasting traditional physical interfaces and expressing thanks for low-cost devices like gesture gloves and speech recognition (such as the Game Commander voice-recognition engine).

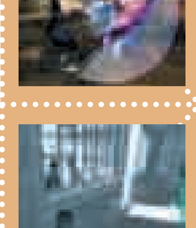
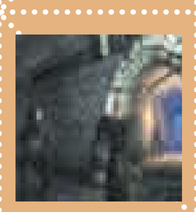
However, there is currently a limited array of devices for the impaired owing to a perceived lack of demand for videogames for those with special gaming requirements. Not only this, but the question of cost raises its head again, with O'Modhrain's article claming that videogames are low on the hardware manufacturers' list of priorities. "If pressed, manufacturers of computer access systems would say that, while their goal is to keep up with leading-edge application development as seen in the gaming industry, in reality they need to focus their energy and resources on supporting the applications people need in the workplace," the article says. But surely some gamers – particularly those who have severe physical impairment – may be housebound to a greater extent and be unable to get access to workplace-based technology? They more than anyone would appreciate home-based gaming.

Tailor-made games

"Adapting individual games for players is a complex and time consuming task and not a commercially practical solution," says Dennis Asher, a web developer at Accessible Arcade Games (www.arcess.com) which makes accessible games. "Accessibility needs to be built into the game design to become widely available," he adds. Accessibility will ideally be married to visionary gameplay mechanics, though. Some of the most rewarding titles in recent times, not least of which the *Dynasty Tactics* releases, have shown that there is equal merit in the involved and taxing. So can we make all titles playable and rewarding for BVI and hard-of-hearing gamers?

Michael Feir is on the verge of entering into accessible game development himself. "As I see it, the industry is just out of its infancy and is starting to grow," he says. "The only reason I now feel able to develop game engines is that two pioneers have developed game engines to make it easier for people like myself who aren't programmers." But how many publishers are willing to cede to demand and view BVI gaming as a viable investment? Dennis Asher believes that while there is a market for very specialised games (like Arcess Games' canon) for players with the most severe disabilities, the majority of players

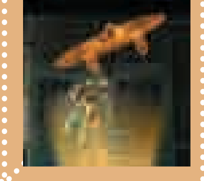
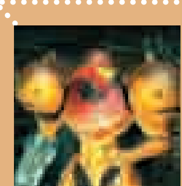







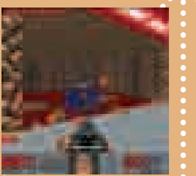
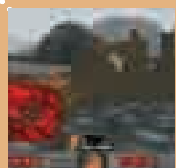
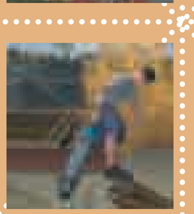

NOT KNOWING OR NOT CARING?

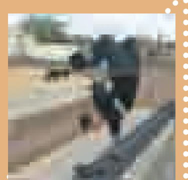
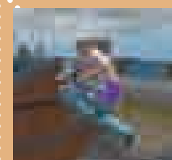
According to the Royal National Institute of the Blind there are 359,000 individuals registered blind in the UK, with an estimated further 750,000 eligible but not registered, and 2 million people with sight problems. In addition, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People says there are 8.7 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK, 698,000 of whom are severely or profoundly deaf. Is the problem that these millions of people aren't aware of accessible games, or that they simply aren't interested in the first place? "Many people that would enjoy such games have no idea they exist," says Nick Adamson, a blind gamer and programmer. "I was 19 before I realised there were games out there that I could play, and a whole community of blind gamers who congregate on the net. However, thanks to the work of a small number of people in this industry the number of blind gamers is growing."

Obviously, there are problems associated with accessible gaming that sighted or hearing gamers don't face, such as the additional expense of adaptive software (like a screen reader) or a special controller. Josh de Lioncourt of Adora Entertainment Software Development, which has created a number of audio-based games, thinks that part of the problem is also the fact that accessible games don't have the exposure that comes as part of being developed or published by a 'mainstream' company. "To the best of my knowledge and experience, no mainstream developers cater for the blind or any other disability group," de Lioncourt says. "Some electronic games have done so, such as Star Wars Simon which was released in conjunction with *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, but none of the 'bigs' like Sony, Nintendo or Microsoft have shown much interest." Unfortunately, we were unable to get comments from any of these 'big' companies…



with disabilities are not severely disabled but still have impairment significant enough to render most existing games unplayable. Evidently, some videogames (*Viewtiful Joe* for one) cause enough hair pulling without further impediments.

"Often," Asher says, "minor changes to those games is all that is necessary. While a completely barrier-free game environment needs to be built at the earliest design stage and tested throughout the development of the game, often a relatively small change to a game design or interface can significantly improve access." Happily, a version of *Viewtiful Joe* (*Revival*) has been released in Japan featuring a Sweet mode intended to ease players into the game because even the original Kid mode was semi-hardcore. And for games like *The Sims* or other PC-based titles, something as simple as making the sprites and icons bigger would be a huge help for low-vision gamers.

Feir is still surprised that nobody has made a side-scroller with stereo sound. "Games like *Mario* would be relatively easy to make accessible," he says. "You just have to make certain that all of the monsters and elements had their own sounds associated with them and make sound decisions about sound priority." We can hope that technological advances will create a level playing field and that the majority of the games that can be picked off the shelf in a high-street store will be accessible to all gamers. But it will be a while before an addictive slice of the gaming pie like *Advance Wars*, for example, can be appreciated by anyone with a sight problem more severe than red-green colour blindness. "While the past decade has seen major improvements in access to educational and productivity software, there has been little improvement in game accessibility," observes Asher.

Getting heard

Paul Silva is more cynical when questioned on the state of the commercial side of disabled gaming, and isn't sure change will come quickly. "The game industry is a highly volatile industry primarily led by extremely conservative publishing companies," he says. "These companies will not take interest in the BVI community's need until one of two things happen: someone proves that this market is very sizeable, or someone sues the game companies and insists that they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and similar legislation. But this does not look seem likely to happen any time soon."

Disabled gamers have come to realise that they represent a previously untapped source of revenue for developers and publishers willing to cater for what is perceived to be a minority group. Although people like Paul Silva, Nick Adamson, Dennis Asher and Michael Feir have a lot of work to do before they attain mass-market penetration and persuade big publishers to releasing relevant titles, what the industry needs to realise is the disabled gamer has a very clear picture of what makes videogames great.

"The past decade has seen major improvements in access to educational software, but there has been little improvement in game accessibility" – Dennis Asher



THE AVERAGE

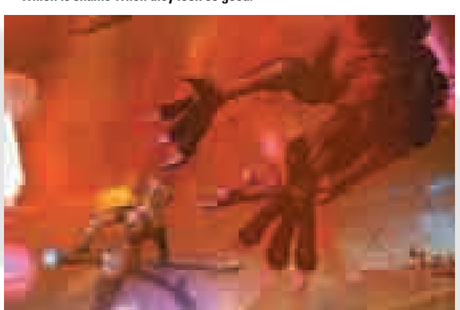
Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below seven (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



Is it a plane? Is it a train? Is it a sandwich toaster? No, it's all three. The shape-shifting Autobots are back to take on the Decepticlones in a mecha-esque romp…

Transformers 100

Unfortunately, the CGI tends to detract from the in-game visuals, which is shame when they look so good.







DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Tecmo

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
May '04 (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

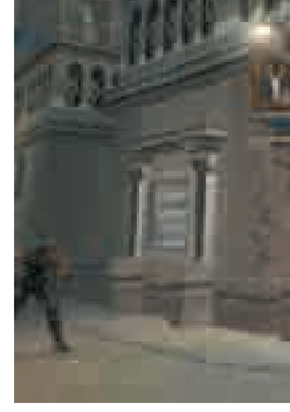
NINJA GAIDEN

NINJAS, DRAGONS AND ROCK-HARD BOSSES – JUST WHAT THE XBOX ORDERED

It's all Capcom's fault. Ever since *Devil May Cry*'s Dante burst onto our screens in a dazzling display of fluid athleticism and daring gunplay, the arcade adventure has never been quite the same. Indeed, few titles (if any) have come anywhere near Shinji Mikami's work of art, and for every *Rygar* there have been several below-average efforts like *Castlevania*, *Chaos Legion* and even Capcom's own *Devil May Cry* sequel. Eager to prove that *Rygar* was no fluke, then, Tecmo has allowed Team Ninja to go back to one of its earliest series and resurrect the adventures of Ryu Hayabusa, one-time ninja master and regular participant in Team Ninja's *Dead Or Alive* franchise. The end result is a breathtaking romp that juxtaposes superbly implemented combat with intrusive CGI cut-scenes and the sort of archaic puzzles that would make the *Resident Evil* franchise proud.

Unfortunately, all is not well for Hayabusa; his village has been burnt to the ground – along with the majority of his ninja brethren – and the Dark Dragon Blade has been stolen by the monstrous demon Doku. Swearing revenge, Hayabusa sets off through some of the most gloriously detailed environments we've ever seen and, in doing so, helps to bring a new lease of life to a rapidly stagnating genre. Of course, considering *Gaiden*'s unapologetic arcade roots, you're not going to find a staggeringly complex narrative or any startling revelations as you make your way through the heavily CGI-led plot. What you will find, though, is some of the most kinetic, highly charged gameplay that's ever leapt onto your Xbox.

From the moment you unleash the fury of your fully charged Dragon Sword to the final showdown with *Gaiden*'s last boss, every slash, swipe and slice is an absolute joy. Ryu Hayabusa is easily one of the most athletic characters we've ever seen and, like Capcom's Dante, he exudes a cool, almost arrogant swagger as he leaps around the screen and dispenses death to anyone that's foolish enough to come within a hair's breadth of his blade. Using the various face buttons, Hayabusa can unleash a devastating array of moves that allow him to throw assailants, deliver deadly strikes of Shurikens and even decapitate his foes, leaving a gushing fountain of blood in his wake. Although initially equipped with his family's Katana and a never-ending supply of throwing stars, careful exploration of Hayabusa's surroundings results in a few additions to his



Visit shops like this one to get your hands on essential potions and weapon upgrades.

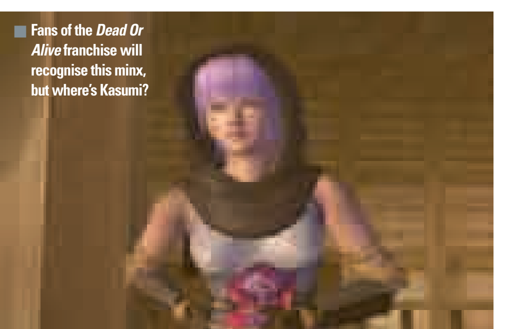


FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CHAPTERS?
Sixteen, and unless you're some sort of gaming god, they're going to take you a fair few hours to complete

Q. ANYTHING TO COLLECT?
Gold Scarabs are scattered around. Take them to the shopkeeper and exchange them for various items.

Q. IT CAN'T BE THAT TOUGH…
You'd better believe it. There are ways to make Hayabusa's life easier, though, with the most obvious being to upgrade your Dragon Sword as soon as you can.



Fans of the *Dead Or Alive* franchise will recognise this minx, but where's Kasumi?



games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ALL-NEW VIEW: Annoying camera aside, *Gaiden's* leap into the third dimension is long overdue and significantly adds to the original trilogy's gameplay. It also lets you fully exploit the interactive scenery.

"RYU HAYABUSA IS EASILY ONE OF THE MOST ATHLETIC CHARACTERS WE'VE EVER SEEN AND HE EXUDES A COOL, ALMOST ARROGANT SWAGGER"

limited arsenal. Incendiary Shurikens, vicious bladed flails and huge oversized blades are just some of the many weapons that can be collected, and all come with their own signature moves and animations. Many can also be upgraded, which opens up even more combos for your nimble protagonist.

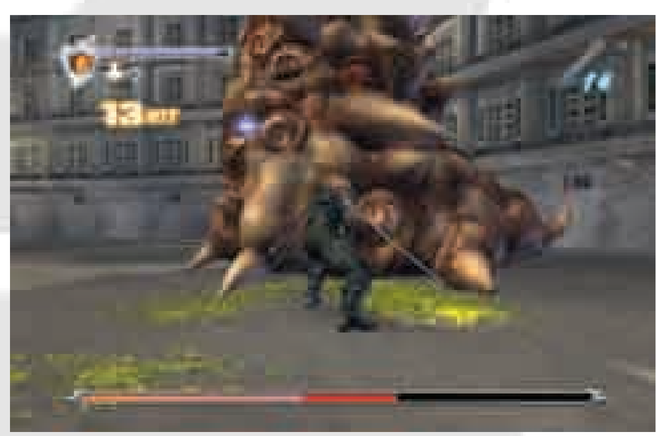
While combat is nicely balanced between melee and missile, though, *Gaiden* only really comes alive when Hayabusa is dishing out death on a face-to-face basis. Combat is reassuringly solid and every move feels extremely satisfying to pull off while connection is gratifying – all enhanced by the sheer amount of claret on display and the thumpingly good soundtracks that increase in tempo as you face even greater adversaries. Once you've finally dispatched your foes (not an easy task when certain areas allow them to respawn as soon as you return to them), their mutilated bodies will leave behind *Onimusha*-style Orbs. Yellow Orbs reward you with money, Blue ones restore lost energy and Red Orbs can be used to restore used Magic; the more outlandish the combo, the bigger the Orb you'll receive, which in turn allows you to buy new weapon upgrades, special armlets or new types of magic. Upgrading your weapons is essential as you'll quickly gain new abilities and be able to perform even more impressive moves.

As good as *Gaiden*'s combat may be (and it's very, very good), it's not without a few flaws. With such a hyperactive main character, it was inevitable that the camera would have a hard job keeping up with him and, sure enough, certain angles do tend to ruin an otherwise terrific combat system. While a quick press of the R-trigger does allow you to re-centre the camera behind Hayabusa – à la *Jet Set Radio Future* – it can still prove immensely frustrating when you're backed up against a wall with nowhere to go. Perhaps in order to show off Hayabusa's skills to their maximum effect, *Gaiden*'s camera often feels too

HERE BE DRAGONS

Ninja Gaiden **may feature a stunning array of bosses, but few come close to the massive skeletal Dragon for sheer pant-wetting excitement. You'll first meet your bony foe in a dormant state as you start travelling deep underneath the game's monastery. Once you've uncovered the relevant missing artefact the monstrous behemoth will come to life and proceed to show you a serious amount of pain. Despite its size the Dragon moves with an almost catlike grace and will attack with a variety of bites, claw grabs and tail swipes. It's a perfect example of how well Team Ninja has executed every boss battle, and while you'll find many of the fights extremely hard going, the satisfaction you feel when you've won is immense.**

He might look disgusting, but his bark is definitely worse than his bite. It's all fancy make up, anyway…





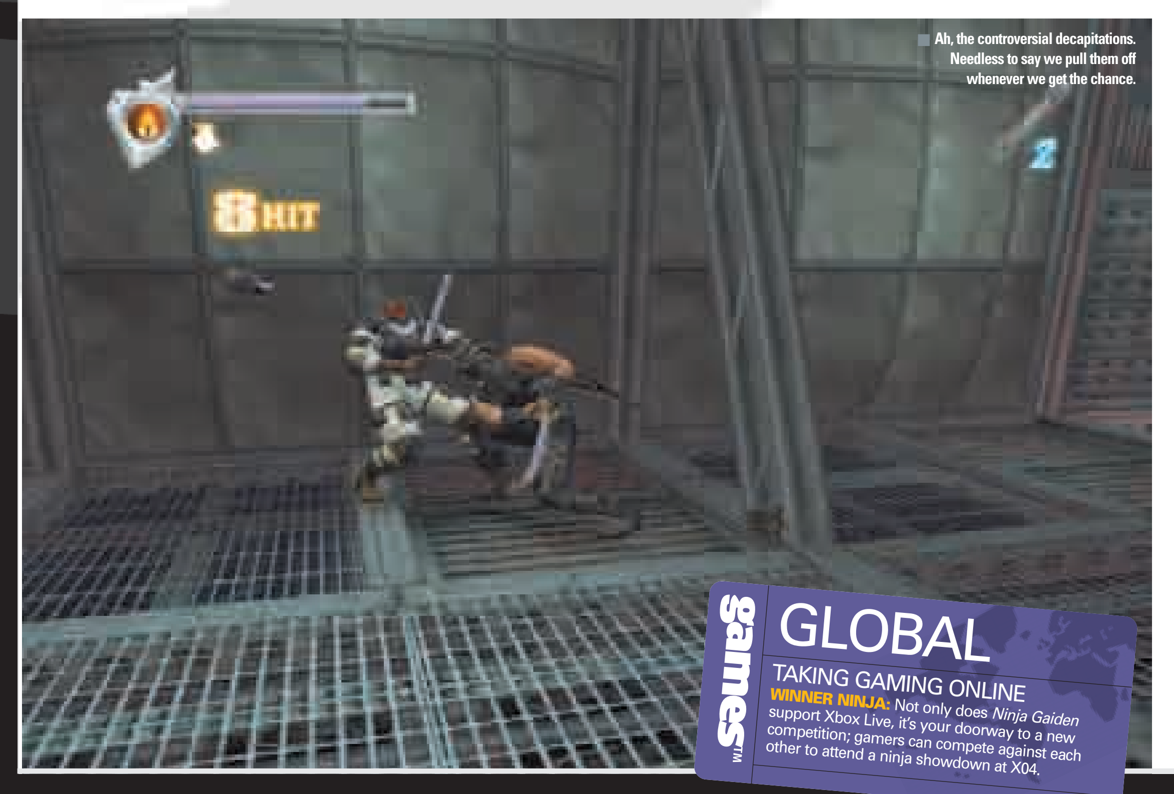
Incendiary Shurikens are great for delivering huge amounts of damage. Be sure to avoid the blast, though.

low to the ground and creates a claustrophobic effect. Again, it's easily rectified but that doesn't stop it being an annoying fault. But the constantly whipping camera is the least of your problems; on top of this, Team Ninja has created one hell of a tough game.

You really are in at the deep end here, as straight from the off you're thrown into the thick of it, with early assailants in the form of rival ninjas proving to be daunting foes in battle. Even with a judicious amount of potions and the ability to buy further items from shrines and shops, early levels of *Gaiden* quickly become a test of endurance – something that's made fully apparent by the many bosses you face. Most are immense and dish out huge amounts of punishment – just look at chapter six's impressively animated Bone Dragon and its devastating bite for an example of what you're up against – with many requiring careful planning before they eventually fall to your blade.

Yet while *Ninja Gaiden* may be one of the most difficult games we've played in the last few months, it's also one of the most breathtaking. Cranking up its *Dead Or Alive 3* engine to previously unseen levels, Team Ninja has delivered exactly the sort of game we were

"THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT GAMES WE'VE PLAYED RECENTLY, BUT ALSO THE MOST BREATHTAKING"



Ah, the controversial decapitations. Needless to say we pull them off whenever we get the chance.

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

WINNER NINJA: Not only does *Ninja Gaiden* support Xbox Live, it's your doorway to a new competition; gamers can compete against each other to attend a ninja showdown at X04.

NIGHTSHADE

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

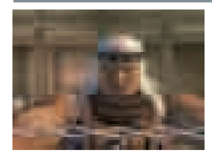


DEVIL MAY CRY

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

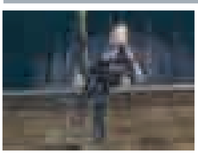
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

00:20 MINS



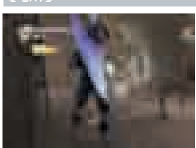
You should have reached the Nunchuku-wielding Murai. He may have arms that look stuffed full of walnuts, but providing you block he's easy to beat.

04:00 HOURS

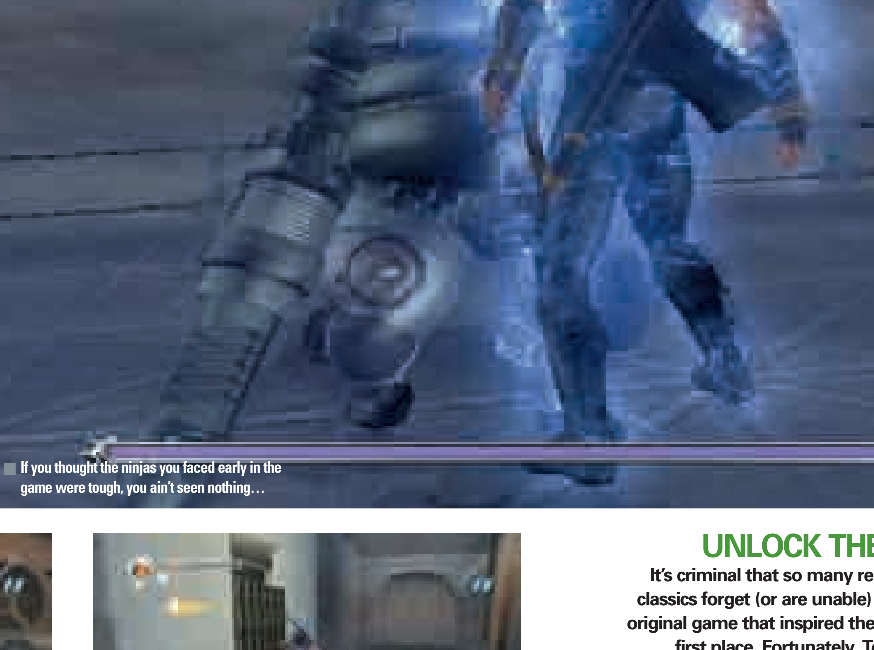


You'll be getting to grips with *Gaiden*'s difficulty and begun exploring the inner city of Tairon. Here you'll meet Rachael, a Fiend Slayer with a huge Warhammer.

2 DAYS



You should have a variety of decent weapons and be well on your way to defeating the final boss (and no, we're not going to spoil it for you). You're now a qualified ninja.



If you thought the ninjas you faced early in the game were tough, you ain't seen nothing…



Fighting in confined areas is a pain, but it creates huge combo potential.



With your energy so low, here's the perfect chance to refill your health.

hoping for visually. Lush lighting, a superb use of textures, and a rock-solid frame rate – locked at 60 fps, we might add – are just some of the delights you can expect to see as Hayabusa continues his bloody quest for revenge. The sheer amount of detail to be found in the game is staggering, and while certain environments lack character (the city of Tairon springs to mind), the quality on show is evident from the very start.

Unfortunately, the loving care that was bestowed upon the game's visuals and kinetic combat was only able to stretch so far. It's not that we're disappointed with the simple *Resident Evil*-style puzzles that appear throughout Hayabusa's adventure, but it would have been nice if they'd received the same attention as *Gaiden*'s blistering fight scenes. Later levels do require you to use more of your abilities – running along multiple walls to discover new routes, for instance – in order to achieve your goals, but we can't help feel that this was a missed opportunity on Team Ninja's part. Nevertheless, *Gaiden* isn't really about the puzzles and while it's easy to dismiss the sometimes-simplistic conundrums in favour of something with a little more substance, they're only a small part of the *Ninja Gaiden* experience.

This game's heart lies in its satisfying combat and in this it excels to deliver a game that's currently unrivalled on its host machine. As developers continue to search in new directions for the next big thing, it's hardly surprising that many of them resort to plundering their back catalogues – after all, Nintendo's been doing it for years. Fortunately, the decision to revive Hayabusa was a wise one, and while he won't be troubling Dante's crown just yet, Team Ninja has built some very solid foundations for the future.

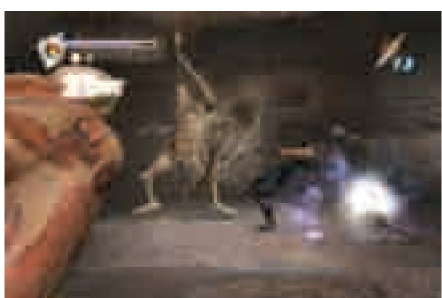


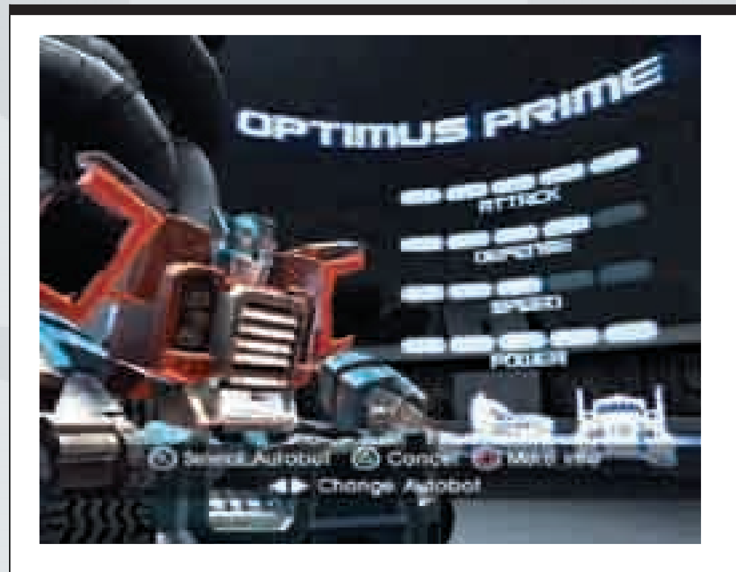
VERDICT 8/10

CHALLENGING, SATISFYING AND A TECHNICAL TRIUMPH

UNLOCK THE MAGIC

It's criminal that so many remakes of past classics forget (or are unable) to include the original game that inspired the update in the first place. Fortunately, Team Ninja has thoughtfully provided you with all three NES *Ninja Gaiden* games to play at your leisure and relive all those fond memories from your childhood. Of course, you have to work for your treats and as a result it may be some time before you sample all three games. Collecting 50 Gold Scarabs will net you *Ninja Gaiden*, while attaining specific ratings on each level will unlock *Ninja Gaiden II* and *III*. Fortunately, there's an even easier way to get your hands on the last two games, but you'll have to work that out for yourself…







OPTIMUS ISN'T PAST HIS PRIME JUST YET

TRANSFORMERS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Australia

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Melbourne House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
9 May

PLAYERS
1

Let's start on a positive note, shall we? Melbourne House's hard work has resulted in what is undoubtedly the best game based on the *Transformers* licence ever. See? Nothing like a bit of optimism to get a review going, especially if it provokes the kind of quote-worthy fodder you'd expect to see splashed across adverts. However, just as *Simpsons Hit & Run* managed to become the best *Simpsons* game simply by not being absolutely atrocious, so *Transformers* performs exactly the same feat by besting dire examples such as *Beast Wars* on the N64 and the recent *Takara* effort on the PS2. But while this could lead you to believe that *Transformers* is as enjoyable as eating broken glass yet still comes top of the pile, there's a silver lining – the game's actually not that bad.

Okay, so perhaps the phrase 'not that bad' doesn't instil confidence, but there's no denying that *Transformers* at least manages to press a few of the right buttons before things start to go wrong. For example, Melbourne House has clearly pulled out all the stops to make the game look as good as it does, especially considering the amount of detail on show no matter how busy things get. Even more impressive is just how big each level is – sprawling regions designed to take you ages to fully explore, all without the hindrance of slowdown or loading. With the rule being that if you can see it, you can usually reach it, we're really rather amazed that *Transformers* even runs on the humble PS2.

However, it's not all just about pretty graphics. While old-school fans might believe that the whole *Armada* setting manages to desecrate our fond childhood memories of the original series by changing virtually everything ('Megatron, a tank? That's rubbish!'), *Transformers* turns this negative into a pretty convincing positive thanks to those damn Minicons – the small and almost Pokémon-esque robots that seem to be so important to today's transforming machine. There are over 40 of the little blighters scattered throughout the game, each endowing your Transformer with a different ability simply by assigning them to one of the four shoulder buttons. Naturally, some

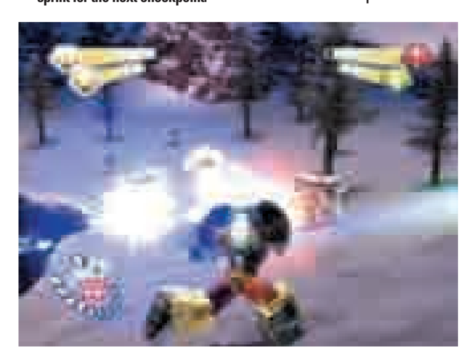
One Autobot against an entire Decepticlone platoon? It's best to turn into a car and sprint for the next checkpoint.

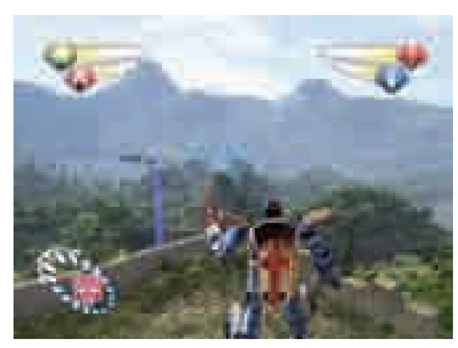
FAQs

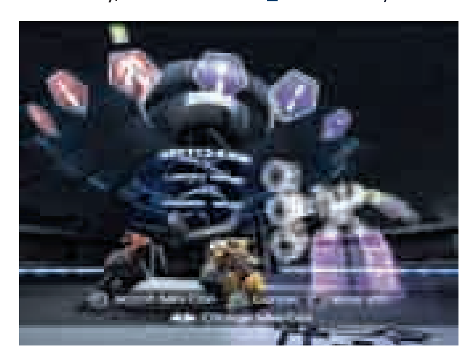
Q. NOT OLD ROBOTS THEN?
Sorry, but no. Atari's game is based on the new *Transformers: Armada* universe that, going by the cartoon, is actually quite rubbish.

Q. MINICONS?
They're special 'bolt-on' accessory robots that give your Autobot additional skills. Deciding which to use once you've found them is a key part of the game.

Q. LOADS TO DO?
Not really. Going back for Minicons you've missed is obviously the big thing, but in terms of finishing the game you're talking hours rather than days.









Revisiting past areas allows you to claim previously unreachable Minicons, but the enemies you'll encounter get significantly tougher.



I HAVE THE POWERLINK

A little way into the game, you'll gain the ability to use your Powerlink buddy – a Minicon unique to each Transformer that can be activated to give you a temporary advantage over your enemies. Hit the Square button and you'll activate the Powerlink ability (effectively just a fancy term for bullet time). Everything but your robot slows down, allowing you to dodge shots and generally take on an entire squad of Decepticlones without being overwhelmed. Unfortunately, this ability drains your energy and can leave you seriously vulnerable once you deactivate it, meaning the whole thing's pretty pointless. It might look special, but you'll hardly ever use it unless you're feeling suicidal.

abilities – shields, better blasters, rockets and even handglider-style wings – come in more useful than others, but your combinations are restricted by the power gauge; attach too many of the powerful Minicons and you'll overload, meaning you can't head out to complete your mission. It's this careful balancing act that helps add a strategic edge to the overwhelmingly frenetic blasting action and, thankfully, the whole game is better off for it.

That said, there's no getting away from the fact that *Transformers* is at heart an all-out arcade shoot-'em-up and it's here that the game falls down. Reminiscent of the flaccid *Brute Force*, *Transformers*' core gameplay couldn't be any simpler: sprint from checkpoint to checkpoint, blast anything that gets in your way and then fight a bigger enemy at the finish. Storming through hordes of Decepticlones is certainly fun at first, but it soon gets dull repeating the same old 'strafe left and right while running' tactic, particularly once you've found the more powerful weaponry and shields that take the challenge out of fighting enemies. Unfortunately, there's virtually nothing else to do – the expansive levels are impressive but devoid of any motivation to explore, apart from collecting the occasional Minicon and special Datacons that might unlock some concept art.

And that's just the tip of the problem iceberg. Whether it's the clunky controls that make negotiating the jumping and ledge-walking sections overly tricky, or the sliding animation that happens whenever you walk over an area that's too steep and leaves you vulnerable to attack, there are plenty of tiny niggles that prove to be more disruptive to the gameplay than they sound. What's



more, the ability to transform from a robot into a vehicle is sorely underused. Short of being able to cover long distances more quickly (something the terrain rarely allows anyway, covered as it is in trees, crevices and other obstacles) and mowing down smaller enemies, there's practically no reason to use it – annoying, seeing as that's kind of the point of being a Transformer in the first place.

And that pretty much sums up *Transformers* in a nutshell – fun, but too annoying and limited to be anything more. It's technically impressive, but that's not all you pay for and, sadly, the gameplay can't cash the cheques that the visuals write. The best *Transformers* game ever? Certainly. But worth £40? You could get yourself an original Megatron reissue for that…

BRUTE FORCE

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

GUN METAL

games™ **FINGERPRINT**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FAR AWAY: If you can see a point on the horizon, you can usually reach it – a rarity for a console game.

LICENCE TO KILL: Licensing issues mean the 'real' Transformers can't die, so we have Decepticlones.

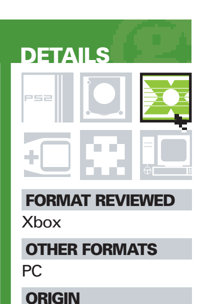
VERDICT 6/10

SHALLOW FUN IN AN ATTRACTIVE ROBOT SHELL



Racing lorries should be powerful and overtly macho; however, it's too plodding to be sexy.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
23 April (US: Out now)

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-12 online)

AND SO BEGINS THE EPIC TALE OF TOCA RACE DRIVER 2…

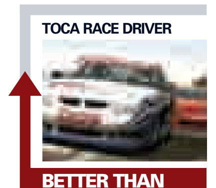
TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

Driving games might seem one-dimensional by their very nature, but there are different approaches to this genre that developers can take. There's plenty of room to accommodate adrenalin-charged seat-of-your-pants racers and simulations that ask you to take the perfect racing line. However, despite Codemasters' best intentions, there's no escaping the fact that shoehorning a storyline into the constraints of a driving game is ill-advised.

It seems trifling to concentrate on an aspect of the game that was perhaps intended as an hors d'oeuvre and not the main meal itself, yet rather than benefiting from its narrative, *TOCA 2* suffers. As the structure of the game has been forced to fit around the plot, there's little choice in how you progress, nor does it help that tasks are consistently difficult simply to tie in with the story. Worst of all, the plot itself is banal, doing little to justify its inclusion at the expense of a flexible game structure. Not that the cause for frustration can be pinned solely on Story mode – the game's handling has to take its share of the blame too. Falling into the same camp as *Project Gotham Racing*'s 'simulation with a dash of fun', control is more about racing lines than speed. However, clipping grass or taking a corner too sharply will send your vehicle into a tailspin; by the time you've recovered the pack will have roared ahead, making restarting the race the only option as no podium finish means you have to start again anyway. You'll find yourself slowing to a crawl for each corner because of the marginal room for error and the strict objectives, but as your rivals also creep around corners at low speed you're never punished for your 'softly, softly' approach. Being so deliberate feels stilted and unnatural, making it hard to build up any rhythm.

Fortunately, this timid approach isn't always necessary thanks to the various driving styles. This is the most appealing aspect of *TOCA 2* and not knowing whether your next challenge will see

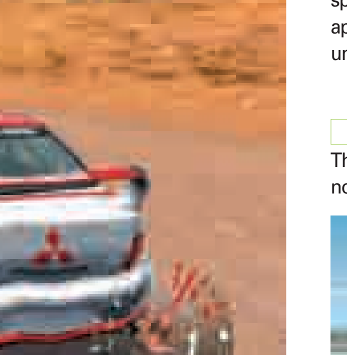
TOCA RACE DRIVER



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2



THE SPICE OF LIFE

TOCA 2 **doesn't have a striking USP under its belt, so it's hard to point to any aspect of the gameplay that's made real strides and pushed the boundaries for racing games. What it does offer is a variety of racing styles that's unmatched in the genre. Sadly, each vehicle comes with its own quirks and faults, the Formula Ford cars accentuating the frustrating and unbalanced elements of the handling while racing Super Trucks is too cumbersome. Even the rally stages suffer from** ***V-Rally*** **bouts of twitchiness, despite being the pick of the bunch. Nevertheless, the light, arcade handling of the rally cars complements** ***TOCA 2*****'s Codemasters stable-mate** ***Colin McRae Rally 04*****, rather than meekly imitating it.**



Ignore fellow drivers at your peril, as smashing into them will be detrimental to your car's overall attributes.





FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Thirty championships split into eight seasons isn't as much as it sounds but there's plenty of replay value.

Q. MULTIPLE PATHS?
No, sorry. You'll have a choice of similar championships at key stages but the end result is always the same.

Q. OPPOSITION?
Some races see you up against 19 other drivers, which works particularly well on the oval circuits.



You have to unlock the tracks and vehicles – such as these stock cars – before you can use them in two-player battles.



you buckling up in a vintage classic or Nissan Skyline keeps interest high. Logic dictates each new vehicle would take some getting used to, so it's surprising to find the transition between cars is often seamless. The off-road stages prove the most enjoyable, as you can throw all caution to the wind, put your foot down and fling your car around the track with reckless abandon. Such contrast in racing styles is refreshing, but it's a shame there's no option to mix and match tracks with cars – you can only use rally cars on the rally stages, for instance.

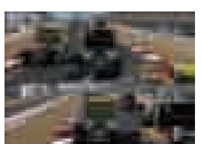
Graphically, *TOCA 2* pulls its weight. The vehicles look gorgeous, displaying a sheen that's almost on a par with *PGR2*. Car damage has been included and while it looks a little too clean it does affect how you race, with the cumulative effect of prangs wearing down your vehicle. Anything from brakes to steering can be affected and the difference in handling is marked enough to ensure you race with care and make the necessary pit-stops, rather than taking your chances. Those who do run the gauntlet also run the risk of race-ending terminal damage, although it's still quite difficult to completely incapacitate your car. The leniency here is much appreciated when *TOCA 2* chooses to be so rigid elsewhere.

Unfortunately, multiplayer hints only at what could have been. Free from the shackles of Story mode, the racing is allowed to flourish without rigid objectives tying you down and the harsh handling is acceptable when racing alongside equally susceptible human opposition. While a limit of just two players and four AI cars will disappoint gamers using a single Xbox, Live and System Link caters for up to 12 players. There's also the chance to see how you rank amongst *TOCA 2* players worldwide and, perhaps most importantly for the impatient, all the tracks and courses are unlocked from the start, saving on the tiresome jaunt through Story mode.

Ultimately, though, *TOCA 2* lacks the ambition and verve found elsewhere in the genre. We've seen *Burnout 2* accelerate into oncoming traffic, *PGR2* screech onto the perfect racing line, and *Colin McRae Rally 04* slide through gravel. After all these, uneventful jaunts down the middle of the road just don't excite us any more…



PC £29.99 23 APRIL



The keyboard highlights the handling weaknesses and races turn into joyrides. But if you have a steering wheel then indulge yourself as there's little to compare on PC.



VERDICT 5/10
JACK OF ALL TRADES, MASTER OF NONE





The impressive physics make every punch you manage to land incredibly rewarding.

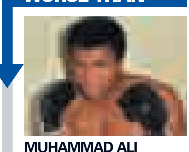
WILL SMITH



BETTER THAN



WORSE THAN



MUHAMMAD ALI

FIGHT NIGHT

EA GIVES THE COMPETITION A POUNDING



Fight Night figurehead Roy Jones Jr teaches *Knockout Kings* endorser Lennox a thing or two.



The fluidity of control when punching and blocking is unparalleled.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
EA Sports

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
30 April (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2 (PS2 Online)

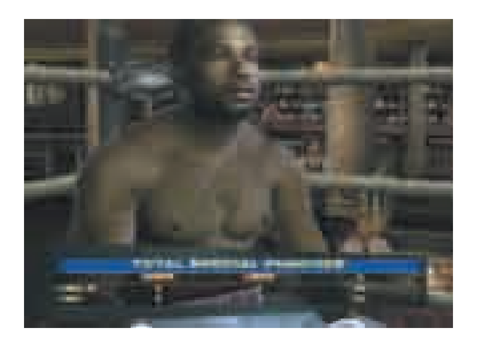
GLOBAL
games™
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
KNOW THY ENEMY: Records and punch stats for your opponents are available before you fight.
WARM UP: Competing in exhibition bouts won't affect your competitive record and ranking.

Wait a second; you're actually reading this? But you know this is a boxing game, right? You're also probably aware that it's another EA Sports boxing game and yet still you persevere? The only explanation we can think of for a cultured gamer like yourself behaving in such a way is that you've seen the big blue eight at the foot of the next page and you're demanding some answers as to what the hell is going on. Surely it would have taken a miracle for EA to transform the tedious button mashing synonymous with the now-defunct *Knockout Kings* series into anything that would warrant our seal of approval? Well, suspend your cynicism for a moment and come with us into an unfamiliar dimension where miracles do happen and the letters EA stand for gameplay excellence.

As part of an ongoing initiative to lace its long-running sports franchises with innovation, EA clearly took a long, hard look at the intricacies of its previous boxing sims and displayed an admirable degree of objectivity by promptly binning the lot and starting afresh. But in a genre where attempts to capture the sport's true essence via the medium of gameplay have consistently fallen tragically short of the mark, where could the development team look for inspiration? To the arcades, of course. Far from the lifeless spectacle of their console-based peers, such interactive experiences as Konami's calorie-burning *MoCap Boxing* have brought show-

ROCKY BEGINNINGS

As if the basics of the sublimely playable and brutally rewarding combat system aren't enough to keep you occupied, the Career mode injects some perspective into proceedings as you embark on an epic journey from obscurity to the top of the world rankings. You'll be able to meticulously customise the appearance of your boxer and evolve their attributes between fights in a number of training mini-games. Arguably the best way to progress your grasp of the controls, the 20-year career also enables you to unlock a variety of new arenas, equipment and even special effects with which to personalise your ring entrances.





2004

stopping ingenuity to the genre, while SEGA's 1992 classic *Title Fight* pioneered a fabulously intuitive control scheme far more suited to home console translation. Players would grasp the cabinet's twin joysticks and control their boxer's fists by making the corresponding motion with the sticks.

Admittedly refined to an impressive degree here, the foundations of SEGA's arcade heavyweight lie at the heart of *Fight Night 2004*'s sublime gameplay. Condensing the concept of 'Total Punch Control' to a single stick, movement of your left and right gloves is linked to the respective 180-degree arcs of the right analog stick. Straight punches, hooks and uppercuts are all performed by making the equivalent motion with your thumb, allowing players to deliver the right blow in any split-second gap that appears in their opponent's defences. A similarly intuitive defensive system is employed to equally impressive effect. Holding L1 lets you roll your fighter's body 360 degrees with the left thumbstick, allowing for some wonderfully fluid ducking and weaving, while R1 shifts the right stick's functionality to an eight-way blocking system for absorbing any blows. The resulting gameplay captures all the thrills and skills of the sport magnificently, as your thumbs authentically mirror the actions you'd make in reality. The level of satisfaction in every skilfully timed exchange is genuinely breathtaking.

Yet the fabulously involving control scheme is only half the story in EA's grand overhaul of the genre's lacklustre conventions. Merely replacing the traditional button tapping with authentic punching motions could have been considered a gimmick had the whole thing not been staged within such a superbly realistic physics engine. EA proudly asserts that no two knockouts will ever be exactly alike depending on positioning, angle of impact and, perhaps most significantly, the momentum introduced into the deliciously realistic equation. Spiced with the perfect degree of exaggeration, every cleanly landed blow connects with devastating ferocity while knockdowns genuinely leave you wondering whether your victim will ever walk again.



■ Hone your skills by taking your fighter from local gyms to the world title.

The physics engine allows play to exist within a fabulously liberating sphere of realism, which combines with the superbly intuitive controls to deliver one of the most authentic and immersive recreations of any sport. The confines of boxing itself impose some limitation in areas such as variation but, in taking this genre from a dead end to the cutting edge of gameplay authenticity, *Fight Night* is an absolute triumph.

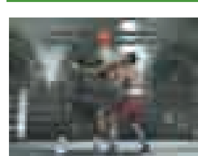
FAQs

Q. KINGS OF THE RING?
A selection of 32 legendary fighters feature in the game. They're joined in the dynamic rankings of the Career mode by a near infinite number of generated contenders.

Q. REDUNDANT FACE BUTTONS?
All regular punches are manually 'thrown' by guiding your fists with the right thumbstick, with the face buttons relegated to 'illegal blow' and 'taunt' duties.

Q. TOTAL REALISM?
While the controls and physics make for a highly authentic experience, the incessant huddling and single-punch KOs of real boxing have been sacrificed in the name of *Rocky*-esque entertainment.

XBOX £39.99 30 APRIL



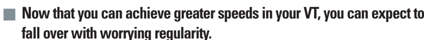
As if the PS2 visuals weren't impressive enough, the Xbox benefits from added crispness. The lack of online play is a sad omission, but the package bursts with gameplay goodness.



VERDICT 8/10
INSPIRED INNOVATION, LACED WITH POLISH

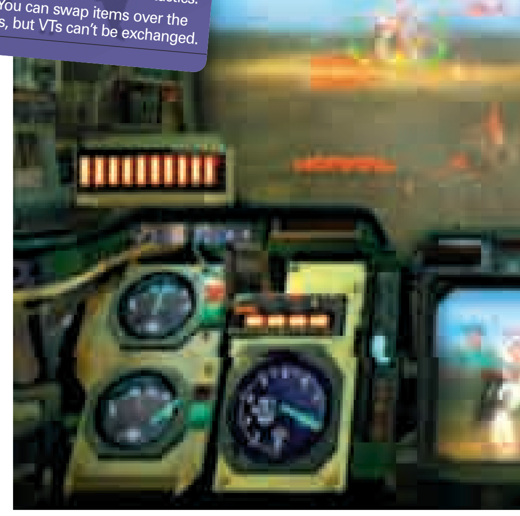





Now that you can achieve greater speeds in your VT, you can expect to fall over with worrying regularity.



Each time you eject you can respawn from a variety of starting places. Just make sure you look out for enemy VTs.



AND YOU THOUGHT STEEL BATTALION WAS A GAMBLE…

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Capcom

PRICE
£40
(£130 with controller)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-10 online only

You've got to hand it to Capcom – for a company that allegedly plays it safe with countless *Street Fighter* rehashes, it's certainly been taking some impressive risks over the past few years. Take *Line Of Contact*, for example; here's a game that's not only useless without its £130 controller, but is also the first Xbox title that can only be played online. If ever there was a guaranteed mis-hit, then surely this would be it…

Line Of Contact's problems start within a few minutes of the game loading up, as this is easily one of the most unreliable titles that we've ever seen on Xbox Live. While there are a surprising amount of people to play against, Capcom's Japanese servers mean that connecting to an actual game can be extremely frustrating – in some cases it's taken more than two hours to simply get a game started without the inevitable fade-out screen appearing and telling us that our connection has been lost. It's ironic that the so-called Quick Match option is the worst culprit for setting up games and Capcom has plenty to learn if it wishes to keep its online fans satisfied. This isn't the first time that a Capcom title has received a tarnished reputation online (*Capcom Vs SNK* immediately springs to mind) so care must be taken, as a great game is suffering because of it.

Get past the game's front-end problems, however, and you'll find much to enjoy in *Line Of Contact*. Ever since the original *Steel Battalion* was released it was crying out for a multiplayer option, and the advent of Xbox Live has allowed your VT (Vertical Tank, for those not in the know) to reach its full potential – providing, of course, you can get online. Once you're connected, you'll be able to choose from four game modes: Battle Royale, Conquest, Capture The Container and the immersive Campaign. For those who simply wish to indulge in a little mechanical mayhem, Battle Royale offers an intense deathmatch that's boosted by the fact that everyone appears on each player's radar, which makes for some truly gripping games. Capture The Container is the *Steel Battalion* equivalent of Capture The Flag, while Conquest sees your VTs teaming up to destroy your opponents and capture their bases.

Playing any of these games – especially Conquest – really allows you to feel the full gratification of unleashing hell in your metal behemoth and, when it works, *Line Of Contact* is easily one of the most fulfilling online experiences that we've enjoyed. There's nothing more satisfying than teaming up with friends (up to ten players can participate in any one game) and letting loose a steady stream of devastation. Add to this several new features of the core gameplay – such as the ability to capture disabled VTs and being able to eavesdrop on your opponents' conversations – and it's obvious that Capcom has put a lot of thought into its latest title (the







FAQs

Q. CAN YOU CUSTOMISE YOUR VT?
You certainly can. What's more, you can paint it all the colours of the rainbow should you really wish to. We've yet to find the fluffy dice and custom spoilers, though.

Q. ANY LAG ISSUES?
Unless you've got an amazing connection you can forget about taking part in any ten-player battles. Even six-player games can prove to be frustratingly laggy, which really defeats the object of releasing a Live-only title.

Q. WHAT'S THE BEST VT?
There are loads of great VTs, but our current favourite is the Sheepdog. Being able to eavesdrop on your opponent is very handy and can make or break some of the intense team games.



SHOW US YOUR MOVES

***Line Of Contact* brings additions to the *Steel Battalion* world that really help to improve the game. You can now customise your mechs, temporarily shutdown your VT in order to escape enemy detection, and even resort to sniping, although you'll need to select the relevant weapon first. One of the biggest improvements, however, is the fact that your VTs can now reach some fairly impressive speeds thanks to a new jet boost. In the original game there was nothing worse than trudging towards opponents at the speed of an asthmatic slug. Fortunately, this has now been rectified. Decent marksmen can also use well-placed shots to take out their opponent's legs (extremely useful if you wish to capture your foe). Add to this the ability to use a surprising amount of stealth and *Line Of Contact* proves that it is possible to teach an old VT new tricks.**

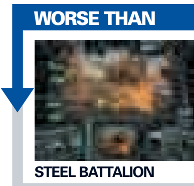


MECH ASSAULT



AS GOOD AS

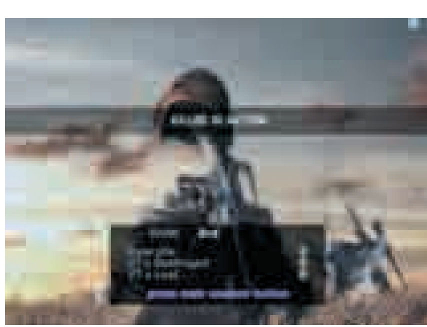
WORSE THAN



STEEL BATTALION

gameplay side, at least). Campaign mode will see the majority of online play and, fortunately, this is where the game excels. There are plenty of missions to enjoy and, while the majority simply take the 'us against them' approach, the feeling you get from working as a team is immense. This mode is all about team play and it's vital that you build a good relationship with your online comrades in order to achieve your goals. Played across two months, each game turns lasts roughly a week and comes with its own selection of maps and VTs. Being able to play in a slowly evolving war is an ambitious move by Capcom, although, sadly, it only serves to highlight how serious the game's connection problems are.

Line Of Contact may look similar to its offline peer (albeit with less pop-up and a greatly improved draw distance) and the 5.1 sound is still as good as ever, but the addition of customisable soundtracks really adds to the aesthetics. Storming your opponents while 'Ride of the Valkyries' is playing in the background is superb and really adds to the game's already absorbing atmosphere. But while we've enjoyed *Line Of Contact*, it's extremely hard to recommend in its current form. Capcom may well have delivered a game that can offer on online experience like nothing else currently available, but it's presented in such a haphazard fashion that many gamers will grow frustrated with the connection problems and simply go back to their other online titles. If it weren't for the inclusion of the original game, gamers who've just shelled out £130 would be finding themselves stuck with a very expensive hunk of useless plastic.





VERDICT 4/10

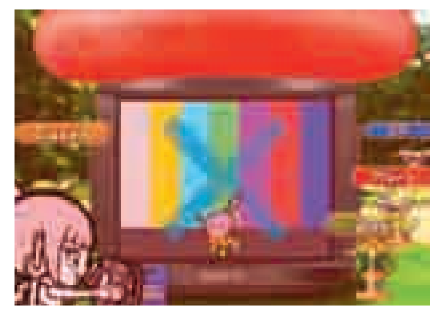
WHY RELEASE A GAME THAT DOESN'T WORK?

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

HANDHELD HAVOC: The simple gameplay means that you can use controllers or linked GBAs.

PROFILE STYLE: The game lets you create multiple profiles, so all your mates can store their scores.



The quicker you complete the mini-games in this mode, the more time you can spend trying to blow your opponents to kingdom come.



Hampering the opposition might not seem fair, but it's certainly fun watching them struggle to win at some of the more difficult games.



Win mini-games here and your opponents end up with more turtles – which can get kind of tricky when you've got to balance on their shells at the end of every round.

MORE THAN JUST A GBA PORT? IT'S STRANGE, BUT TRUE…

WARIO WARE INC. MEGA PARTY GAME$

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$29.99

RELEASE
TBA '04
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

Multiplayer games aren't exactly rare, but few can spark all-out shouting matches like *Wario Ware Inc* on the GameCube does. This, of course, is in direct contrast to the GBA version of Nintendo's frantic mini-game-'em-up, which managed to get our blood boiling on long trips but felt like a missed opportunity through the lack of link-up action. But where the GBA failed, the GameCube succeeds in style.

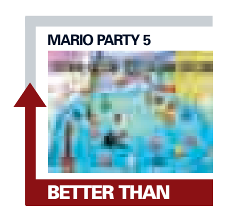
Obviously, more cynical gamers (we should count ourselves among their number) will most likely be wondering what all the fuss is about – it's the GBA game ported onto the Cube with extra bits tacked on. But there's more to it than that. Yes, so the entire GBA package (mini-games, characters and everything in between) is included on the disc, but that's purely for when you can't get a group of friends together. If you're the kind of person who'd dismiss the game purely on this basis, you're really missing the point. The emphasis in *Wario Ware* on the Cube is firmly on the ability to bring up to four people together for the most enjoyable party-style gameplay this side of *Super Monkey Ball*.

Rather than having the mini-games lined up one after the other as on the GBA, they're placed in the context of other mini-games. For example, one mode sees players taking it in turns to play mini-games – while one person plays a game, the others hammer the A-button to inflate a giant balloon. Success at the mini-game passes play onto the next person and if you happen to be 'it' when the balloon explodes, you lose. There's also an Othello-style game where winning mini-games earns you pieces on the board; a spotlight selector where players attempt games at random; or an e-Card-style mode where you can steal completed game cards from your opponents. There's 11 modes in total, with four others mixing things up for more concentrated play.

It might not sound like much of a change, but the shift of focus into multiplayer territory is quite enough to make *Wario Ware* appealing all over again. We just hope Nintendo releases it in Europe some time soon.

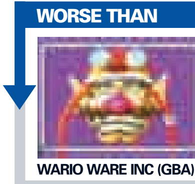
VERDICT 7/10
THE SAME GAME MADE BETTER WITH FRIENDS

MARIO PARTY 5

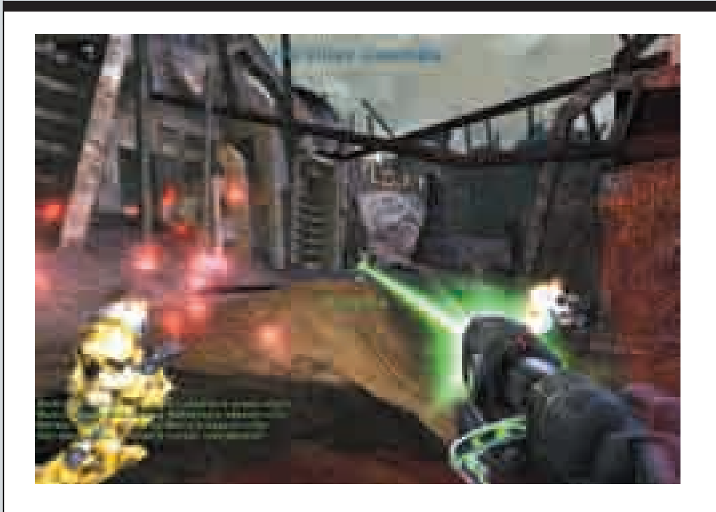


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WARIO WARE INC (GBA)





games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
CHAIN REACTION: New mode Onslaught is arguably the best on offer here.
RETRO CHIC: Set sound and weapons to mimic the original, and some favourite levels are here too.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, RIGHT?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Atari
DEVELOPER
Epic Games
PRICE
£29.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1 (1-32 online)
MINIMUM SPEC
128Mb RAM (356Mb on Windows 2000 and XP), 5.5Gb HDD space, 8x DVD-ROM, DirectX 9-compatible sound card, 64Mb of video memory

So you're a big videogame firm and your latest game is just about finished. You know it's good, so you want as much coverage for it as possible. But, in an act of curious defiance, you allow only a select few to sample your wares ahead of time. Snap back to reality and it looks like with *Unreal Tournament 2004*, we've got another case of 'buy the name, not the game' arrogance. Have the changing ways of Rockstar and co taught people nothing? Sigh…

Once again, the *Unreal* experience is a frantic and reaction-based one, and even the more complex modes work well with everything tearing around at breakneck speed. The net code is such that most games we played were seldom struck with lag – always a big concern, especially with the pace and precision involved. Assault mode makes a welcome return, even if several maps are a little too convoluted, and new modes like Onslaught and the interesting co-op monster hunting of Invasion really make this more than just another annual update.

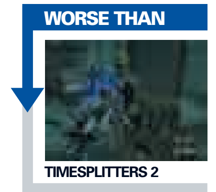
The single-player campaign has more weight this year too, and while playing against bots is often worlds apart from a human opponent the chance to learn the levels, hone your skills and find your favourite tool is welcome, especially with the high standard of AI on display. After hand-picking your team, you battle through all manner of big-money competitions, all the while buying new stars, paying players' wages and amassing a fortune in the management-lite core.

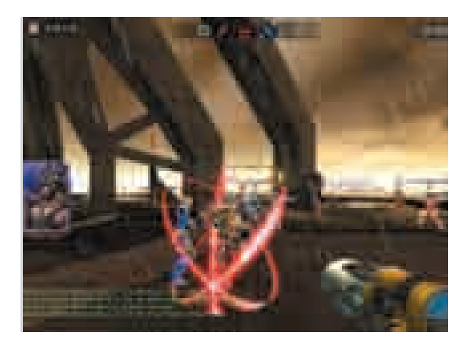
If you've ever so much as seen an *Unreal Tournament* game, you'll know what to expect here and, thanks to the addition of vehicles, modes and maps galore, this clearly represents the culmination of genre evolution thus far. It's difficult to see where the series can go from here, but we're sure to find out in the next 12 months or so, right, Atari?

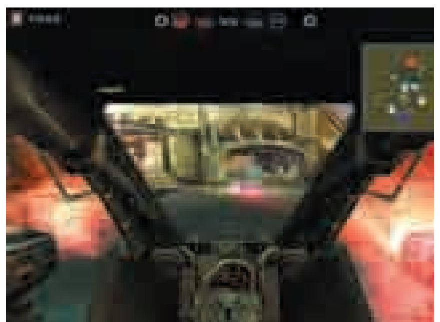
VERDICT 8/10
FORMULAIC AND FAMILIAR, BUT SOLID AS THEY COME

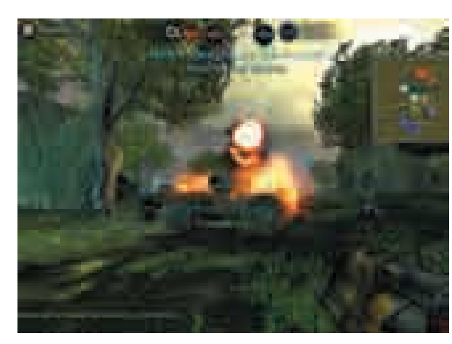
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

BETTER THAN

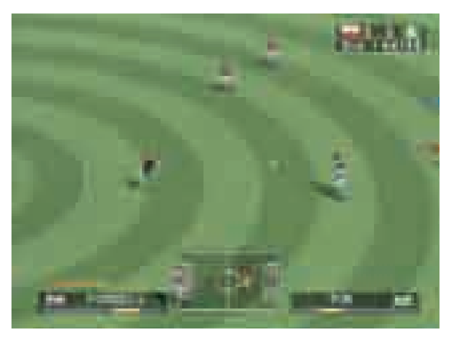
WORSE THAN

TIMESPLITTERS 2



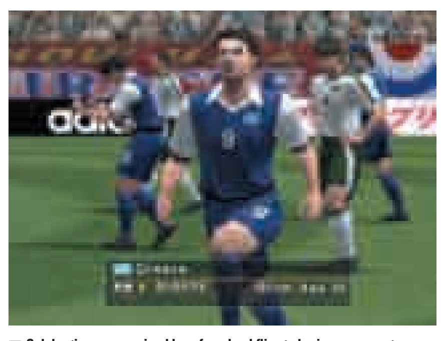





eMag




It's nice to let the keeper have a crack when you've got a good lead.



Celebrations are a mixed bag, from backflips to boring non-events.



Players now help each other up after nasty tackles, but not this time…

THE KONAMI ARMY STILL MARCHES ON

WINNING ELEVEN 7 INTERNATIONAL

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TWEAKED: Most of the changes to *International* are rather minor but noticeable alterations…

ALMOST: … but a few of the game's more annoying niggles are still here to bother you.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£49.99 (Import)

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8



So then, when is the long-promised and much-touted *Pro Evolution/ Winning Eleven* online play finally going to be implemented? Naturally, recent news of an Xbox *Pro Evo* has got a few tongues wagging, but in the here and now, we're still without network support for this generation's best sports series. Online or not, we've finally got hold of a copy of Japan's latest update in the popular football series and, after extensive play (purely in the interests of research, you understand), we think we've more or less settled on just what sets this apart from its illustrious predecessors.

To the untrained eye, *International* could very well be simply an import version of *Pro Evo 3* – changes are small and while their effects are noticeable to those well-versed in the ways of the series, it's hardly the leap that *WE6* to *Final Evolution* was. As is always the case with this series, 'enhancements' are double-edged, so while we're overjoyed that the handball, offside and advantage rules have all been tweaked to good effect, it's not all encouraging news. The effects of the speed stats have been toned down slightly to create a more balanced and skilful experience; this, in reality, only serves to render a whole bunch of speed-reliant teams near redundant. There is also a whole host of new animations thrown in to make for a more broadcast-style front end – more like something from the EA stable than what we've come to expect from Konami.



Once again, *International* offers a challenging and enjoyable single-player investment but it's not until a second controller comes into use that it truly shines. Quite how a game can be so deeply rewarding one minute and so profanity-inducing the next remains one of the biggest mysteries in the industry, and as worked up as you may get there is an unmistakable allure that won't let you reach for the Reset button. If you've already got a version of *Winning Eleven 7* or *Pro Evo 3*, this is not enough of an update to warrant re-buying, but newcomers who have the means to play import games may want to consider picking it up, especially given that this is the most complete and the most import-friendly edition to date. As long as you're not averse to the idea of sitting down for a few hours and renaming a lot of players, that is…



VERDICT 9/10
EVEN CLOSER TO PERFECTION

THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

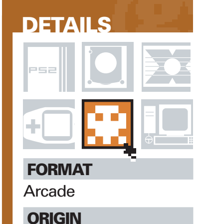


SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

NOT SO MUCH FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE AS PRODDING A DEAD DONKEY



SAMURAI SHODOWN V



DETAILS

FORMAT
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SNK Playmore

DEVELOPER
Yuki Enterprise

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

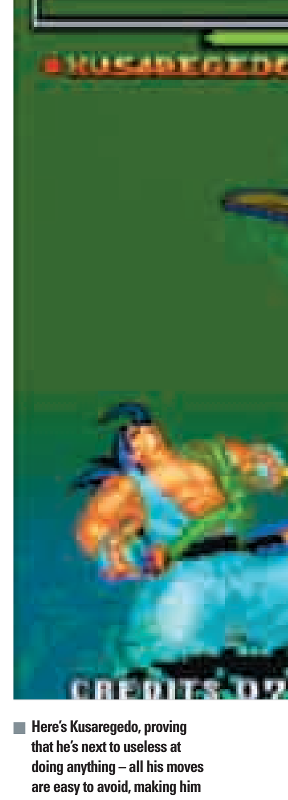




While Capcom fans around the world had to make do with just the *Street Fighter* legacy until crossover titles like *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* came along, supporters of the SNK brand have always had far more choice of fighting fare. *Fatal Fury*, *Art Of Fighting*, *King Of Fighters*, *Last Blade*… whatever your preference and playing style, there was something for you. However, thanks to a careful balance of elegant locales, finely tuned characters and a reliance on timing rather than flashy combination moves, the *Samurai Shodown* series remains one of the firm favourites among many people. Or at least, it did until the latest instalment came along.

It might have been riding high on a wave of expectation since it was announced, but SNK's fifth *Samurai Shodown* game has washed ashore with little to offer. The title's graphical style is dated, thanks in part to this being one of the very last games to use SNK's ageing AES technology (although older games, such as *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, actually look better on the same system). Visually, the original *Samurai Shodown* was beautiful – full of authentic Japanese architecture and atmospheric locations which went a long way towards creating the game's unique feel. Unfortunately, this latest offering from Yuki is not only disappointing from a technical point of view, but it's actually far less creative from an artistic perspective too. One level, for example, is set in front of a Japanese palace, while another is on the deck of a galleon – both great locations, but ones that look cobbled together without quality craftsmanship. Unfortunately, aside from these flawed new backgrounds, many of the others on offer have been lifted straight from *Samurai Shodown IV*, only re-drawn with gaudier colours.

But this distinct feeling that Yuki has merely pilfered what it considers to be the better aspects of the last game and then slapped a new number on the package doesn't stop there. The



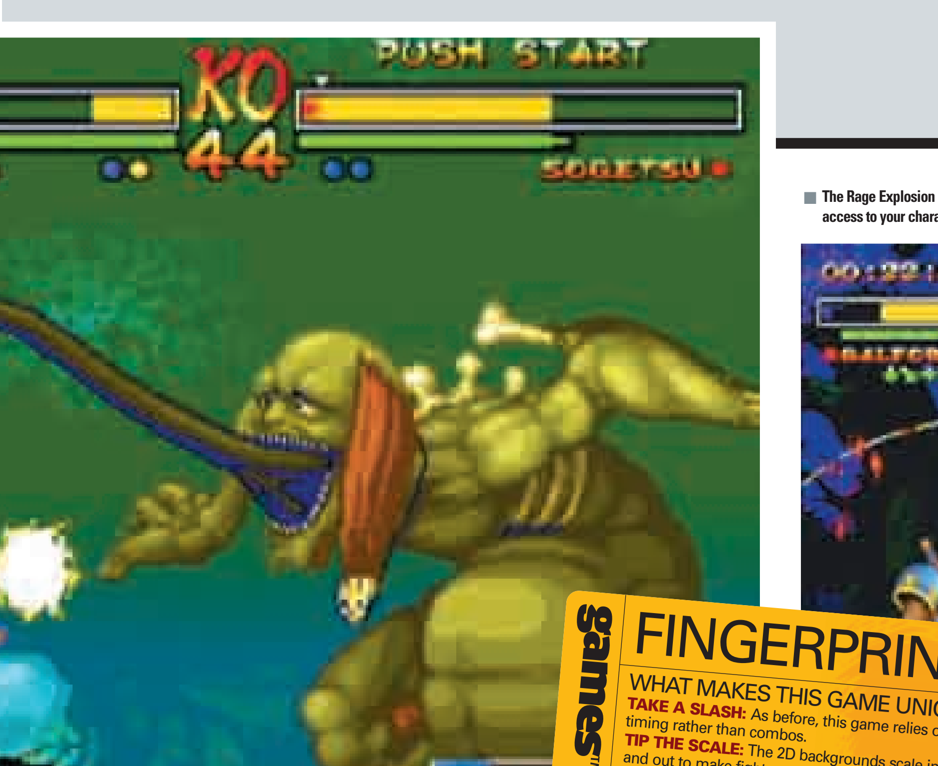
Here's Kusaregedo, proving that he's next to useless at doing anything – all his moves are easy to avoid, making him the worst character ever.

Admittedly, some of the backdrops looks quite nice, but then most of them have been pilfered from the last game, so that's hardly a plus.



Each character has very different playing styles, but that only serves to unbalance the gameplay and make some absolutely useless.





■ The Rage Explosion is still here, as activating it is the only way you'll be able to gain access to your character's single devastating super move.



games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TAKE A SLASH: As before, this game relies on timing rather than combos.

TIP THE SCALE: The 2D backgrounds scale in and out to make fights more dramatic





developer's seeming lack of appreciation for what has been an otherwise decent series carries right through from very basic things like the main interface to the gameplay and beyond. Pretty much everything on offer has been done far better in the previous titles and the new characters – who range from the petite, bow-and-arrow-wielding Mina to the virtually uncontrollable Kusaregedo (who's so large that he almost doesn't fit on the screen) – don't make the impression you'd expect of new additions to the roster. Indeed, having experienced the development of the series since its very beginnings, it's fair to say that there's very little within this fifth outing to convince newcomers, or indeed veteran *Samurai Shodown* players, to have a go.

Naturally, there is a flipside to all this, if only because of the game's heritage. The gameplay that's been carried over from the previous titles is still commendable, comparing well to many newer offerings. As before, the combat still relies on timing instead of combos, with precise connections and well-placed hits managing to remove as much as 25 per cent of your opponent's life gauge. In addition, to make the game even more realistic, the developer has included the ability to hit the deck to avoid swipes aimed your way and even kept the option to commit an honourable suicide during the last game if a fight isn't going your way. But to be honest, both features feel slightly tacked on and a more experienced *Samurai Shodown* player will soon brush them to one side in favour of more traditional tactics.

This particular concern is one that seems to dog every aspect of *Samurai Shodown V* – the new elements are pretty useless, and the old favourites haven't been improved enough to warrant making the game worth playing. What makes matters worse is just how slapdash the application of the core gameplay has become; many of the characters are unbalanced (making one-on-one human battles rather pointless), and yet even if you decide to choose the weakest against a computer opponent, you should be able to get to the last boss without any real challenge. Despite the anticipation, *Samurai Shodown V* is a real disappointment – only hardcore fans are likely to enjoy this, and even then the enjoyment will be short-lived.



VERDICT 3/10

A LACK OF INNOVATION RESULTS IN DISAPPOINTMENT

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Out of all the new ideas in *Samurai Shodown V*, only two are really of note. Below your life meter there's a new element called the Kenki Gauge that dictates how much damage you do to your opponent. Stand still and it rises but as you attack it decreases – constant attacks might punish your enemy, but they'll reduce your attack strength as a result. There's also a new move called Mu no Kyouchi which can only be activated when you've lost a round and have virtually no energy left. Doing so activates what can only be described as bullet time, allowing you to pummel your opponent as they move in slow motion. Interesting, but hardly the most original of ideas.

KAKUTO CHOJIN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



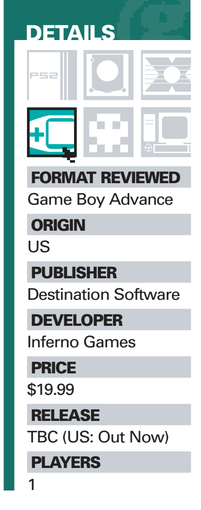
SAMURAI SHODOWN IV

FAQs

Q. NEW FACES?
Only four, although four others are 'reinvented' by appearing in their Bust incarnations from earlier *Samurai Shodown* games.

Q. WHAT'S MISSING?
Lots of things from previous efforts – there's no Bust or Slash options, the Rage Enhanced and Sword Grade systems are gone, and a number of lesser tweaks have also been removed.

Q. ANY STORY?
The Japanese version does contain in-depth story scenes and other interesting elements, but there's no English translation so it's all missing from the Western release.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Destination Software

DEVELOPER
Inferno Games

PRICE
$19.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

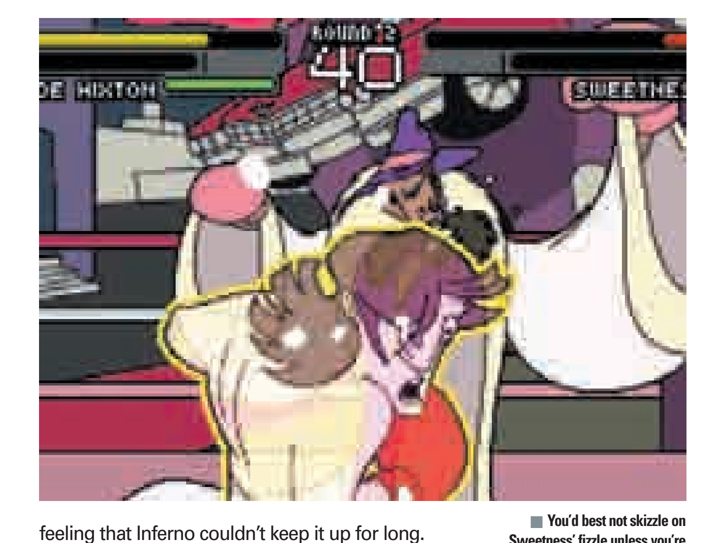
WHAT DO YOU MEAN IT'S NOT BY NINTENDO?

WADE HIXTON'S COUNTER PUNCH

You liked *Super Punch-Out!!*, right? And you've been waiting for a GBA version or something similar to while away dreary bus journeys with a cunning mix of reactions, memory and cunning? Welcome, then, to *Counter–Punch*'s target audience. At a budget price and coming from (with all due respect) two industry nobodies, the warning lights were flashing when this oddity slid into our GBA. Despite an unmistakable *Black And Bruised* feel, these alarm bells quickly gave way to the odd wry giggle, a lot of predictable-yet-hard-to-avoid attack patterns and a severe case of 'one more go' fever. For a while there, it even seemed like *Punch-Out* itself had been, well, punched out.

Action on the canvas is excellent, relying primarily on your reactions to see a blow coming, dodge or block it accordingly, and take advantage of your unbalanced foe with a lethal flurry. These get harder to predict and avoid as the battles go on, and each character has a trademark blow, like Rocco's legally questionable 'raccoon in a bag' attack or the improper use of voodoo in the ring. As well as a healthy slice of third-person phantom boxing, *Counter Punch* also provides outside the ring. A simple interface allows you to scour the town and engage in fights or power up to your heart's content, earning cash for your hard-fought victories and spending it on new moves with which to flatten foes.

Despite blinding us with pretty visuals and spot-on gameplay, there was always a nagging feeling that Inferno couldn't keep it up for long. And we were right. A total of nine pugilists – that's including the mullet-sporting lead – is all that stands between you and supreme glory, and once you've memorised a few patterns there's nothing to stop you tearing through this in a couple of hours. Sublime while it lasts, you will occasionally come back to *Counter Punch* just to see what the GBA really is capable of. A few more titles of this standard and those clever 'nobodies' at Inferno could well become somebodies…



You'd best not skizzle on Sweetness' fizzle unless you're particularly fond of being slapped upside the heezay. Fool.

READY 2 RUMBLE: ROUND 2

BETTER THAN

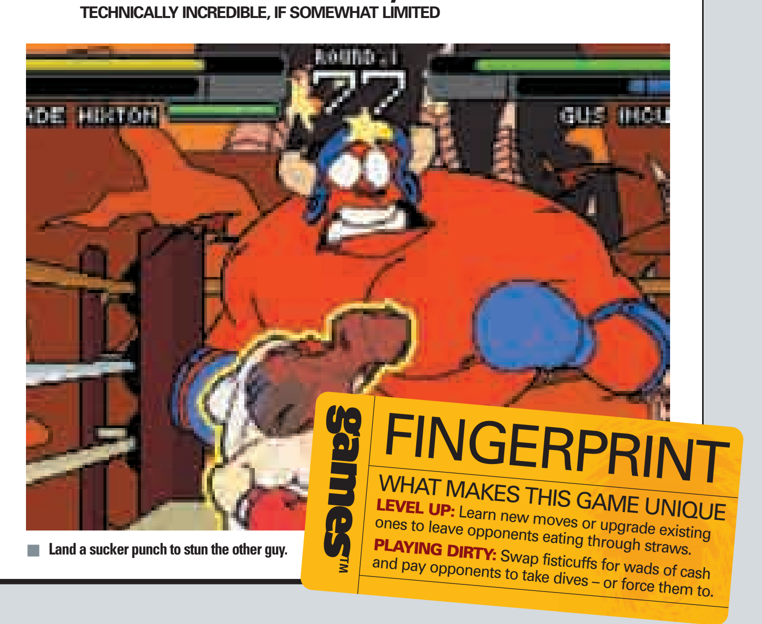
WORSE THAN

SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!

VERDICT 7/10
TECHNICALLY INCREDIBLE, IF SOMEWHAT LIMITED



Forget originality – *Counter Punch*'s recoveries are down to good old-fashioned button mashing.



Land a sucker punch to stun the other guy.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LEVEL UP: Learn new moves or upgrade existing ones to leave opponents eating through straws.
PLAYING DIRTY: Swap fisticuffs for wads of cash and pay opponents to take dives – or force them to.


eMag


The shift in style from cutesy to quasi-mature is a touch heavy handed but presents some interesting visual moments.



Some of the creature animations are absolutely beautiful, especially the overly dramatic throes of 'fainting'.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

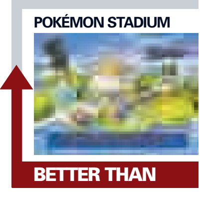
DEVELOPER
Genius Sonority

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
May '04

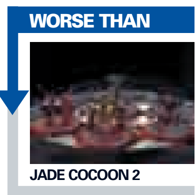
PLAYERS
1-4

POKÉMON STADIUM



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



JADE COCOON 2

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM



STILL CAN'T TELL A SNORLAX FROM A SPOINK? TURN OVER NOW…

If you're not a fan of Nintendo's colourful licence to print money, this game will be less important to you than a Blazin' Squad tribute album. If, on the other hand, you've put in the hours on *Ruby* or *Sapphire* then you'll be wanting (or needing) to get *Colosseum* – but know this: while there is definitely purpose and enjoyment here, this is not the ultimate monster-battling game that it so easily could have been. The same separated attack animations that plagued the N64 games aside, there's a fair amount to do in the two very different game modes but this is a severe case of Nintendo preaching to the converted.

The biggest problem with *Colosseum* is that you'll find it not only filed under 'mixed bag' but practically stapled to the sign itself. Monster models and effects are as well-realised as anything else the Cube has produced lately, yet some less impressive trainers appear to be suffering due to the resulting polygon shortage. One town will be a lush forest haven, the next a third-rate Lego settlement. Every element of the presentation is similarly erratic – music can jump from orchestrated beauty to sub-MIDI ear torture in a matter of minutes, but, worst of all, monster calls are still of the same blippy 8-bit quality that they were back at the dawn of the phenomenon.

It seems that one man's inter-console collectathon finale is another's last-ditch attempt to save the over-flogged horses of connectivity and Pokémon. With the link-up aspect started back on the N64 and the series still going strong commercially and critically, we'd have to say its definitely closer to the former, and while *Colosseum* isn't anything like the revolutionary title that's needed to change the fortunes of the Cube (or raise the profile of connectivity), it's still an important part of the Pokémon series. Be it the fact that this generation of monsters is now fully accounted for, the notable change in the direction and feel of the series, or just the fact that this combines RPG action with the familiar Stadium battles, this is definitely a case of better late than never. It's just a shame it couldn't have been a bit more consistent.

VERDICT 6/10
DECENT RPG FARE THAT WILL DELIGHT FANS







DOWN, DOWN TOWARDS, TOWARDS, PUNCH – THE FAMOUS SPECIAL MOVE LIVES ON…

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Capcom

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
30 April
(Japan: Out now)

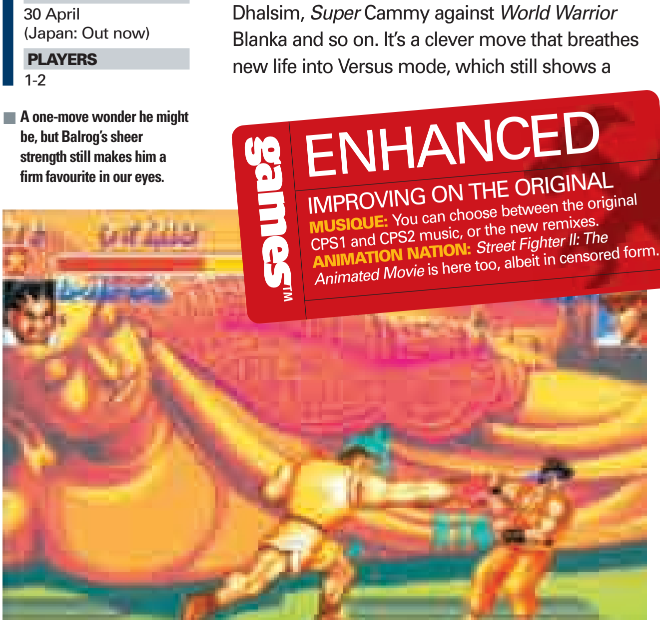
PLAYERS
1-2

A one-move wonder he might be, but Balrog's sheer strength still makes him a firm favourite in our eyes.

Newsflash: 2D fighting isn't dead just yet. Mourners may have wept their last pixellated tears, yet the genre continues to defy its sell-by date. While it remains to be seen how much more life can be squeezed out of two dimensions, though, Capcom has at least exhumed *Street Fighter II* for a glorious tribute to the series' past.

Put simply, *Anniversary Edition* is a compilation of *Street Fighter II* games covering the era between *World Warrior* and *Super Street Fighter II X*. What makes this collection unique is that every fighter from every game has been brought together, meaning you can have *Turbo* Ken versus *Championship* Dhalsim, *Super* Cammy against *World Warrior* Blanka and so on. It's a clever move that breathes new life into Versus mode, which still shows a surprising capacity to entertain. Yes, part of the appeal is hearing Ryu's battle theme and instinctively humming along, or the satisfaction at executing Zangief's spinning piledriver, but this game's success owes as much to flamboyant character design, depth and balance as it does to nostalgia.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
MUSIQUE: You can choose between the original CPS1 and CPS2 music, or the new remixes.
ANIMATION NATION: *Street Fighter II: The Animated Movie* is here too, albeit in censored form.



Not including mid-game button configuration is an oversight that becomes apparent when you have *Street Fighter* fans brought up on different editions, consoles and pads, but it does little to tarnish the appeal of the timeless Versus mode. This is great news for fans – however, newcomers may find the experience slightly wanting. The single-player game is a series of fights against *Super X* opponents without a plot to give the fights meaning, or even bonus rounds to break up the pace. Games like *Capcom Vs SNK 2* successfully distracted gamers from their flimsy single-player structure with a wealth of modes and playing styles, but *Anniversary Edition* doesn't benefit from this scope; understandable, given its age, but it's still something to which Capcom should have paid more attention.

There's little incentive to scratch the surface of the game if you're not familiar with the series, as the fighting initially feels basic alongside *Virtua Fighter 4* and its ilk. While it can be argued that *Anniversary Edition* is rather incestuous and never tries to appeal beyond its fans, outsiders probably wouldn't be keen on this party anyway. But for those invited to Capcom's celebration the future of the genre is uncertain, but, oh, to remember the past…



VERDICT 7/10
DEFIES ITS AGE BUT ALIENATES NEWCOMERS



TERRORISTS BEWARE – VALVE HAS YOUR NUMBER

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
CLEVER: Bots are now smart, hunting you down and disarming explosives with scary accuracy.
GUN RACK: All your favourite weapons and more besides are available for all your lead-flinging needs.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

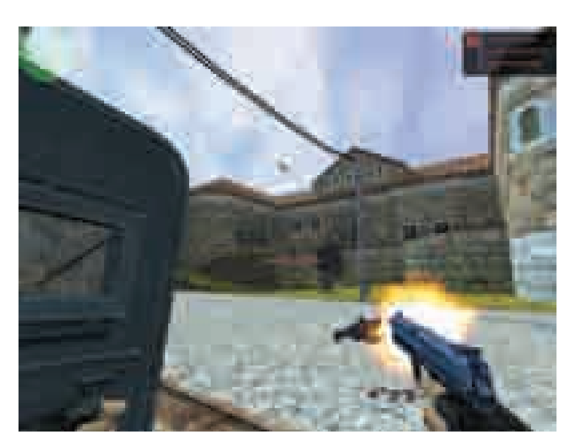
DEVELOPER
Valve/Turtle Rock Studios

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-32 online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium II 233 MHz, 32Mb RAM, DirectX 7.0, 800Mb Hard Disk space, Windows 95/98





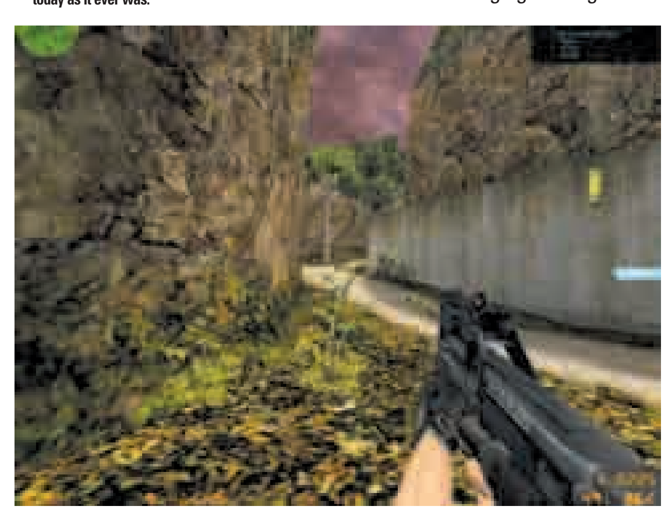
As in the Xbox version, many of the weapons have been renamed since the golden days of *Counter-Strike*.

The twists and turns of the development trail are many and varied but seldom to the extent of *Condition Zero*. Having gone through no fewer than five developers and all manner of guises, the game has veered from single-player campaign (a rather ropey affair that now finds itself filed under 'Deleted Scenes') to official bot program and ends up lacking a real solo experience, offering little more than a series of bot matches with minor extra objectives tacked on. Perhaps this description doesn't do the game justice – the bots, a few hiccups aside, display impressive intelligence and actually act much like a human player in most situations.

Remarkably, the ageing *Half-Life* engine does a respectable job of hiding its age; good use of colour and clever level design give the game a clean look, even if some of the modelling and texturing is a little primitive. Since this means that most current machines will happily run the game at a suitably silky rate, the game operates wonderfully online and is opened up to a wider audience than power-hungry titles like *Far Cry* or *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Sound is one of the key areas of enhancement and the bots chatter away, for the most part keeping you informed about key objectives or the location of enemies. It's when they show a little character that they impress most, and to hear Morris yell 'Owned!' at a fallen terrorist really does create a sense of camaraderie.

Once again, *Counter-Strike* proves strangely tough to pin a score on – for what it is and on its own merits, it's the ultimate version of the world's best online game, period. However, we can't escape the fact that this is little more than *Counter-Strike 1.6* with decent bots – a game we've been playing for years and for free. As with any popular series, the fact that *Condition Zero* players will have access to more servers than 'old-school' gamers will twist many an arm into parting with some cash. The return on the investment will invariably be good – updated versions of old maps retain their quality and as more content becomes available this will really come into its own. As an offline training tool for the hectic world of network play and a stepping stone to bigger and better things, *Condition Zero* is a triumph, but as a standalone game it can't offer more than 'more of the same'. Which is no bad thing.

The mixture of fast-paced gameplay and realistic mortality is every bit as good today as it ever was.



VERDICT 7/10
IF IT AIN'T BROKE…

COUNTER-STRIKE (XBOX)



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3


eMag





Interacting with the locals is an important part of the game. They may help you out if you get stuck later.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

FRIEND OF FRIENDS: Linking up your GBA allows various elements from *A Wonderful Life* and *Friends Of Mineral Town* to be shared. The further you play in each title, the more you unlock.

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

THE CUBE BRINGS HARVEST MOON WONDERFULLY TO LIFE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Natsume

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

More animals, a vastly expanded catalogue of crops, and countless new gameplay elements – but should we welcome an enhanced version of Natsume's cheery farmyard RPG with open arms or is the enchanting simplicity of the *Harvest Moon* series under threat from this wealth of new features? Happily, the developer has done a wonderful job of sympathetically preserving the unique charm of previous instalments while evolving the concept into a wholesome offering that's worthy of the current generation.

The most immediately obvious difference between *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* and its predecessors is in the visual department, where the game has made an incredibly successful transition into glorious 3D. This lavish graphical overhaul brings the quaint village of Forget-Me-Not and its quirky residents to life superbly and exudes a hypnotically tranquil ambience that epitomises the ideology of the series. Resplendently captured day/night cycles cast steadily creeping shadows and bathe the world in sumptuously moody lighting, while expanded attention to detail in the gradually changing seasons combines to take the game's immersive appeal to a whole new level.

Players are again invited to become absorbed by the leisurely pace of life in the village and are never under pressure to expand their list of daily chores beyond watering a handful of crops and tending a single cow. This delightfully therapeutic experience is inherently destined to grow slightly dull after a while, but that's where the added depth comes into play. A wide range of opportunities are available to explore when you're ready to delve deeper into the game, yet they never complicate matters. The game is staged over 30 years and spans six chapters, constantly evolving the situation while introducing a steady stream of new elements to ensure farm life remains interesting. The concept can feel rather limited during excessive periods of play, but the spellbinding atmosphere and continuously evolving playing field will draw you into its enchanting clutches time and time again.



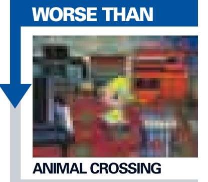
You can build a collection of animals if you like, though you'll start with just one cow and a pet dog or cat.

HARVEST MOON (SNES)



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



ANIMAL CROSSING



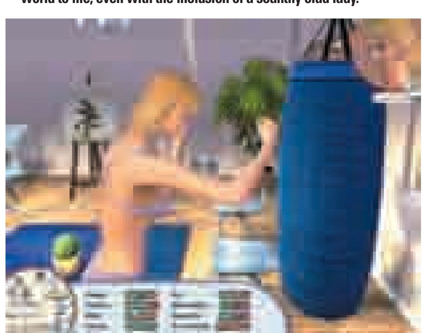
VERDICT 7/10

MAKES THE TRANSITION WITH ITS CHARM INTACT


eMag

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
NOT FOR KIDS: Unflinching in its nudity and sexual references, the 18 rating is sure to draw a crowd.
OOER, MISSUS: Refusing to take itself seriously, humour to ranges from *Carry On* to cringe-worthy.


The advanced 3D engine impresses at first but fails to bring the game world to life, even with the inclusion of a scantily clad lady.




A soap-opera scriptwriter was brought in to furnish the English version of the game with more risqué dialogue.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC
ORIGIN
Germany
PUBLISHER
Deep Silver
DEVELOPER
Rotobee
PRICE
£19.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1
MINIMUM SPEC
1GHz processor, 256Mb RAM, 700Mb HDD space, 32Mb graphics card

SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

CAN ROTOBEE MAKE OUR WAIT FOR THE SIMS 2 ANY MORE BEARABLE?

Considering the deluge of copycat titles that customarily follows hot on the heels of every successful gaming innovation, it's a wonder we haven't seen more attempts to clone EA's magnificent life simulation *The Sims*. As the best-selling PC title of all time we'd have expected the genre to be teeming with pretenders to the throne by now, but even *Singles* publisher Deep Silver admits it has no intention of challenging EA's dominance. Pitching its intriguingly raunchy spin on the familiar *Sims* framework as more of a 'software toy' than a wholesome gaming experience (your aim being simply to encourage two people to get it on), the title's potential to deliver little more than a few hours of light-hearted amusement is clear from the outset. But with the long-awaited *The Sims 2* still some way off, could *Singles'* impressive 3D engine and budget price provide gamers with the perfect stopgap in the meantime?

Despite an unashamed refusal to take itself too seriously, the game's timing, pricing and 'mature' content do make the package a genuinely attractive proposition. If the gaming public was willing to shell out 20 notes for the inane *The Sims: Makin' Magic* expansion pack, surely a similarly priced kit offering detailed 3D visuals and scenes of full-frontal nudity would get your average gamer more excited than a few lame magic tricks? From an aesthetic standpoint, at least, the game does a pretty sterling job of delivering on its promises with bump-mapped character models and impressive environmental detail to match.

The playing experience, on the other hand, is where all the nice touches and attention-grabbing premise horribly fall apart. A lack of purchasable items to make your flatmates' lives interesting leaves them with virtually nothing to do aside from chatting each other up. Sadly, this merely entails telling flatmate one to flirt with flatmate two again and again until they finally decide to consummate their relationship. Risqué set-piece conversations spice up the monotony as things progress, but essentially life in the flat is a painfully hollow experience to which the eventual moment of intimacy becomes an inevitable anti-climax.



VERDICT 3/10
A COMPLETELY LIFELESS LIFE SIM

JUST LIKE

THE SIMS

WORSE THAN

THE SIMS



Going from a brush to a dual-ended brush and onto a jackhammer is easier than you might think…

Make too many messy sentences and your ink will rapidly run out, hurtling you towards game over. And you never thought neat handwriting was important…



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEJ

DEVELOPER
Nana-On-Sha

PRICE
£39.99 (import)

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

YOU'RE LUCKY THIS PAGE ISN'T WRITTEN IN RHYME

MOJIB RIBON

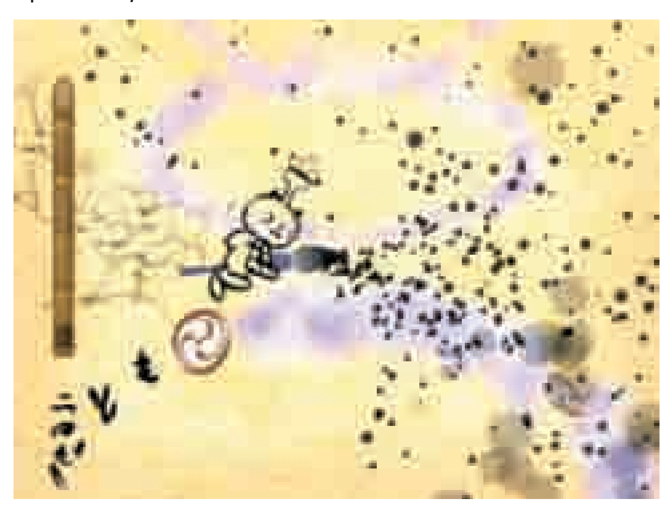
With the world's quirkiest rhythm-action developer now turning its attention to some *Where's Wally*-esque nonsense with the forthcoming *Vib Ripple*, we figured it was high time we appreciated its previous work. Cue a mammoth *Parappa* session, a lot of *Um Jammer Lammy* and what can only be described as a hedonistic *Vib Ribbon* binge before arriving at *Mojib Ribon*. By this point we've been taught to drive by a moose, cooked burgers with a bearded ghost and danced along more lines than we can recall so we're ready for almost anything. Almost…

The concept for *Mojib* couldn't be simpler. Controlled entirely with one analog stick, ink-blob Mojiburi walks along circles of words, writing and rapping as he goes. You have to pull down the stick at the beginning of each phrase and release it at the end. Simple enough, but in order to get sufficient ink on your brush a quick flick up is required before each down stroke. This is where much of the precision and difficulty lies – skip on the ink and the sentence is scratchy, soaking the brush makes the text blotchy, and failing to release in time will leave a messy blob. As with *Vib Ribbon*, successive failures will result in de-evolution and you'll need some substantial skills to pull it back from the brink.

Perhaps the most depressing part of *Mojib*'s linguistic barrier is that it negates a large portion of the content. For instance, one of the better features allows players to email one another through PS2 Online with the recipient being able to play back the message as a series of raps – has there ever been a gentler way of leaving a lover than to do it through a rapping inkblot? But *Mojib* is not unplayable on import; basic play is so simple that anyone can pick up and enjoy this title. In fact, it may be the case that understanding the rhymes would ruin the game's charm – this would be devastating as the simple visuals and catchy tunes make this one of the most original and stylish games on the PS2. Even though *Vib Ribbon* made it to the UK, the phonetic nature of the speech synthesis and translation issues in *Mojib* will almost certainly rule out a PAL release. But fear not – while we'd urge everyone to witness *Mojib*'s beauty, it's too simple and repetitive to be an essential purchase.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
VOCALS: Mojiburi actually sings the text as he walks along the rings of words.
TRIO: Select from the boy, the girl or the robot to rap for you, each with their own voice.

Miss the start of a pattern and Mojiburi will trip, spilling precious ink everywhere.

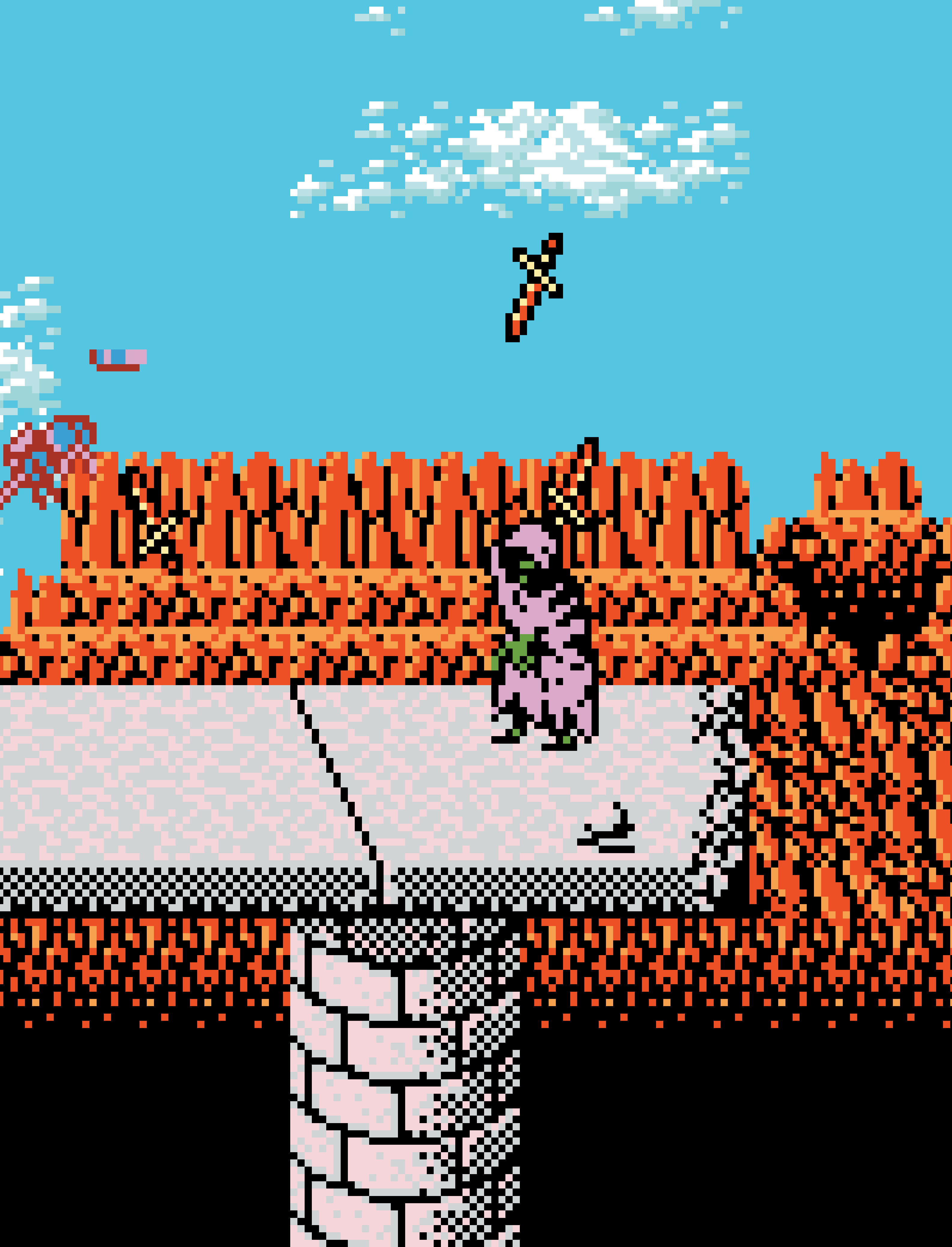




VERDICT 6/10
AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER




“Whatever you do, don’t call him a ninja…” **Shadow Warriors NES [Tecmo] 1991**




eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.18 MAY 2004
00p
RETRO
MICRO
FINAL FIGHT
Read all about Capcom's classic beat-'em-up inside!
Thingy And The Doodahs
Is this forgotten game really as strange as it sounds?
LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
Find out how real-life ninjas influenced your favourite games
BBC MICRO
WAS THIS YOUR FIRST COMPUTER?
Go Supersonic with Sonic The Hedgehog
WHAT WERE YOU PLAYING IN 1994?
CLASSIC GAME SYSTEM BUYERS' GUIDE
PLUS!
WE INTERVIEW POWERDROME CREATOR MICHAEL POWELL

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming…

With mobile gaming already branching into the realm of 3D and the recent unveiling of Sony's first PSP title, it's sometimes far too easy to get caught up in the latest fads and trends. While transition can be difficult for many industries, games are continuing to evolve for the better and it's something that we don't fear, but openly embrace. Even though we're as eager as you when it comes to absorbing the latest XNA development videos, or guessing exactly what Nintendo's new DS will actually look like, we never forget that nothing can have a future without first having a past.

Some gamers might scoff at the likes of *Donkey Kong*, *Pong* or *Pac-Man*, but a quick play reveals them to be just as good now as they ever were when we first played them. Still, that's not to say that retro games are vastly superior to their modern-day alternatives, but current technological advances wouldn't have come about if it wasn't for these early titles.

So as the front of this issue looks to the next generation of hardware and software, here in the retro section we're getting some guilty pleasure out of some classic ninja action and a detective dog…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

Street Fighter III Strikes Again

Capcom's 3rd Strike hits PlayStation2

Capcom has announced that a PS2 version of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* will soon be released in Japan. Originally launched in coin-op form in 1999, the game wasn't the hit that Capcom wanted, but there was no disputing that it was a very beautiful and extremely playable product.

As one of just a handful of titles developed on the CPSIII arcade board, *SFIII: 3rd Strike* featured some of the finest 2D animation ever crafted for a videogame. Kicks and punches used many more frames than the earlier games in the series, and even minute details such as creases in clothes had been included. Because of this immense visual splendour, the Dreamcast was the only console capable of running a translation at that time.

Why Capcom has waited until now to port the game to PS2 is anyone's guess, though we have to admit that we're looking forward to pulling off Dragon Punches on a decent D-pad at last. There are also plans for a deluxe version, but details are scarce.



▲ A bit of *3rd Strike* can be yours in the comfort of your own home without faffing around with arcade boards.

Long Live The King

SNK unveils the first shots of KOF 3D

We first reported that SNK was developing a 3D *King Of Fighters* game back in issue 12, and at last we've received the first images of the game in action. Unfortunately, it seems that our worst fears have become reality – the game looks a lot more *Tekken* than *King Of Fighters*.

Twenty-four playable characters are set to be included, six of which are brand new to the series. So far only three of the new faces have been revealed – Alba, Soiree and Lien – with Soiree looking almost indistinguishable from *Tekken*'s Eddy Gordo.

Veteran *KOF* players will be aware that *Tekken*'s button-bashing antics aren't particularly well suited to the usual *Street Fighter*-esque gameplay, so we're keeping our fingers crossed that SNK has found a better way to use the capoeira fighting style. We'll keep you updated.

A NES In the hand…

Nintendo Of America has confirmed that the Famicom SP will make its way stateside this summer under the name NES Game Boy Advance SP. Due to hit the shelves on 7 June, the hardware is set to launch with eight titles – *Donkey Kong, Pac-Man, The Legend Of Zelda, Super Mario Bros, Excite Bike, Ice Climber, Xevious* and *Bomberman* – priced at $19.99 each. The machine itself is being styled to look like a NES controller, though we don't have a price for it yet.

This Month In 1994

This was the year that Wet Wet Wet hogged the top of the charts for three bloody months with Love Is All Around, and Nintendo chose cartridges over CDs…

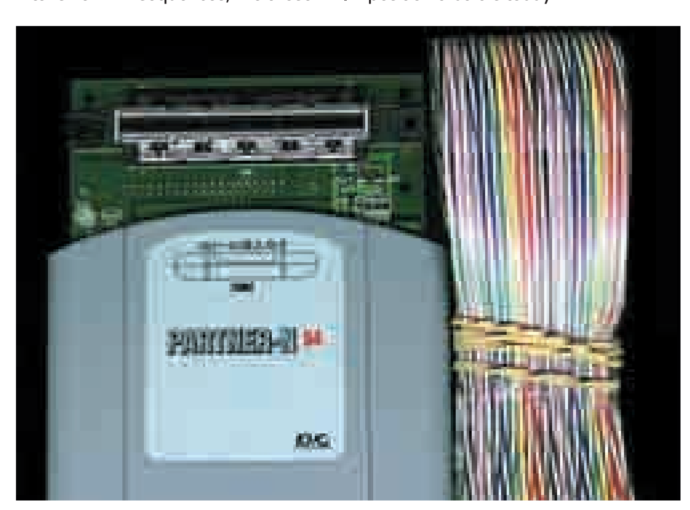
GAMING NEWS MAY '94

Carry On Cartridges? Nintendo pulls a funny

It was exactly a decade ago that Nintendo confirmed that its upcoming console, codenamed Project Reality, would use cartridges rather than CDs. The decision had apparently been made because Nintendo wasn't confident that it could manufacture a piracy-free CD-ROM-based system, though sceptics suggested that it was merely an easy way for the company to control its third-party developers and charge higher prices for games.

Of course, the limited amount of memory available with the cartridge format meant that game designers had restrictions on the size of their creations. Furthermore, memory-intensive FMV sequences, like those regularly seen on the PlayStation, were a luxury that few developers could afford to include. The problem ignited a feud between Nintendo and Squaresoft, and although Japan's premier RPG development house had once created titles exclusively for the SNES, it then chose to work predominantly on Sony's format.

It was also this year that Sony Computer Entertainment America was set up to deal with PlayStation projects Stateside. Set up a year before the US release of the machine, it was surprising that the best titles it could prepare in time for the launch were *NBA Jam* and *Mortal Kombat 3*. But ten years ago Sony wasn't in the position that it is today.



▲ Nintendo's cartridges – a cunning anti-piracy move, or a way of controlling third-party developers? Hmm…

UK Charts in May 1994

1. **Come On You Reds**
   Manchester United Squad
2. **Inside**
   Stiltskin
3. **The Real Thing**
   Tony Di Bart
4. **Sweets For My Sweet**
   CJ Lewis
5. **The Most Beautiful Girl In The World**
   TAFKAP
6. **Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm**
   Crash Test Dummies
7. **Around The World**
   East 17
8. **Love Is All Around**
   Wet Wet Wet
9. **Just A Step From Heaven**
   Eternal
10. **Light My Fire**
    Clubhouse Featuring Carl

Top movies in America, 1994

Forrest Gump
$329,691,196

True Lies
$146,261,000

The Santa Clause
$144,833,357

The Flintstones
$130,512,915

Dumb & Dumber
$127,175,354

Clear And Present Danger
$122,012,710

Speed
$121,226,560

The Mask
$119,938,730

Pulp Fiction
$107,930,000

Interview With The Vampire
$105,264,608

In the news today

Ayrton Senna Killed In F1 Accident

Tragedy struck this month in 1994 as Formula One champion Ayrton Senna was killed in a horrific accident at the San Marino Grand Prix in Italy. Senna, who was considered by many to be the best driver in the world, was travelling at 192mph when he lost control of his FW16 Formula One car and careered off the track and into a concrete wall.

An investigation revealed that a faulty steering column was the most likely cause of the accident, and three of the Williams-Renault team were charged with manslaughter as a direct result of the fatal crash. All three were later acquitted.

Following the tragic event, Senna's body was flown back to his native Brazil where almost half a million mourners lined the streets of Sao Paolo to bid their farewells. Already a hero in Brazil, Senna's premature demise cemented his name as one of the country's best-loved exports.

Strangely, Austrian F1 driver Roland Ratzenberger had died in almost the exact same spot, known as the Tamburello curve, the day before Senna's fatal crash. Coincidence? Who knows…



S·O·N·I·C T·H·E H·E·D·G·E·H·O·G 2

Completing the frustratingly difficult special stages in *Sonic The Hedgehog* was the only way to collect all seven Chaos Emeralds and unlock the better ending. Great for completists and arguably the only true way to finish the game, yet it still seemed like scant reward for so much work. You could almost hear the collective groan of gamers everywhere as they hit the goal icon during the special stages by mistake and found themselves unceremoniously booted back to the game proper, postponing their quest for the perfect ending until they found another 50 Rings.

The Chaos Emeralds made a return in the sequel but, fortunately, the special stages were made easier for Sonic's second outing. Sonic and Tails would have to run along a half-pipe and collect a set number of Rings while avoiding bombs to get their hands on a Chaos Emerald. Yet again, it was the only way to see the proper ending but there was another surprise in store for those who collected all seven Emeralds…

This time, collecting 50 Rings after obtaining all the Chaos Emeralds allowed you to turn into Super Sonic. Jump into the air and the spiky blue hedgehog would turn into his invincible, flashing yellow alter ego that could run and jump at twice Sonic's normal speed – although, to be precise, Super Sonic didn't run, instead preferring to glide along and destroy any Badniks in his path.

The number of Rings would become a timer, counting down to zero and returning Sonic back to his blue, vulnerable self once they had run out. But those few moments were enough to ensure Sonic players were checking every nook and cranny of each level to find as many Rings as possible, just for those precious extra seconds as Super Sonic.

As news spread of the existence of Super Sonic, Chaos Emeralds went from a minor bonus to a genuine reason for persevering with the special stages. Gamers wanted to see Super Sonic for themselves and would often return to the game once they had beaten it, not for the proper ending but to experience Super Sonic for themselves. And what euphoria once they finally got to see the yellow hedgehog in action – yet another great retro gaming moment for those who did.



Format: **Mega Drive**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **SEGA**
Release Date: **1992**



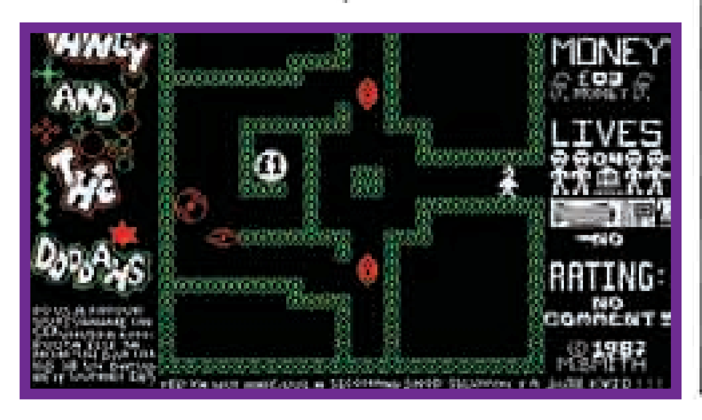
GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

THINGY AND THE DOODAHS

No, we haven't forgotten what its full title is and we certainly aren't making it up – this 1986 Spectrum title really is called *Thingy And The Doodahs*. Why? Good question. You've been told to collect £60 and buy a computer from a second-hand shop, otherwise "ya mum 'un dad ull kill you".

To raise the cash, you have to search your house and collect pound coins as you go. Except, of course, the rooms in your house are re-arranged in mazes and include locales such as forests to stretch the absurd concept as far as it can go. There are enemies in your house that have to be avoided too, although it's never explained what they're doing there to begin with.

Written by Michael Smith with a little help from "the family, Loon and Wally", it wasn't just the name that left a bad taste in the mouth. *Thingy And The Doodahs* suffered from repetitive gameplay that was samey and uninteresting. Negotiate the maze, avoid the enemies, collect the coin – that's all there was to it, room after room until all 60 coins were collected. Add hideous graphics and terrible music and it's clear that more deliberation went into the title than the actual gameplay. Although, on second thoughts, we're not too sure that much thought went into that either. Perhaps the fact that this game has slipped into obscurity is because people would rather have bought any other game in the shop than look daft asking for *Thingy And The Doodahs*…





OPERATION WOLF (Arcade) Taito, 1987 – Original Arcade Flyer

DESPITE BEING THE LEADING COMPUTER FOR SCHOOLS IN THE EIGHTIES, THE BBC B HAS A LOT MORE GAMING ABILITY THAN PEOPLE GIVE IT CREDIT FOR...

BBC MODEL B MICROCOMPUTER

If you're lucky enough to have been at school during the early to mid-Eighties, chances are you've used a BBC computer. As the machine of choice for educational establishments across the country throughout most of the decade that fashion forgot, the selection of software written specifically for the purpose of improving young minds was pretty comprehensive. But this isn't surprising given that the computer was conceived solely for such a purpose – all thanks to that great national institution, the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Having devised the BBC Computer Literacy Project in the early Eighties (a campaign to bring Britain up to speed with the rapidly approaching technological revolution), the BBC decided that the best way to promote such a scheme was to feature computer demonstrations on a television show that everyone could watch. While coming up with such a show wasn't a problem (*The Computer Programme* began in 1981), finding a machine that could do everything the BBC wanted it to do wasn't.

"WHY I LOVE MY BBC"

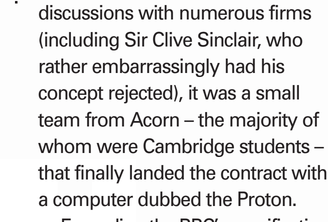
As the first machine my parents ever bought me, it's only right for the BBC to still have a place in my heart. Not only did it help me learn (as was probably the reason I had it in the first place), but it started me on the road to loving games.

MARTIN M ATHERS

Proton Power

After much debate, it was decided that the BBC should brand its own computer, and after drawing up specifications for such a machine it set about taking offers from various companies to produce it. After discussions with numerous firms (including Sir Clive Sinclair, who rather embarrassingly had his concept rejected), it was a small team from Acorn – the majority of whom were Cambridge students – that finally landed the contract with a computer dubbed the Proton.

Exceeding the BBC's specifications in every way, the group's hard work – which ran right up until the night before transmission to ensure that the machine worked properly – had clearly paid off. However, the original machine (the BBC A) was rather limited and it wasn't until Acorn upgraded the machine's capabilities with the BBC B by doubling the amount of RAM and adding functionality for a disk drive that it became the essential machine for schools everywhere.



ALMOST FAMOUS

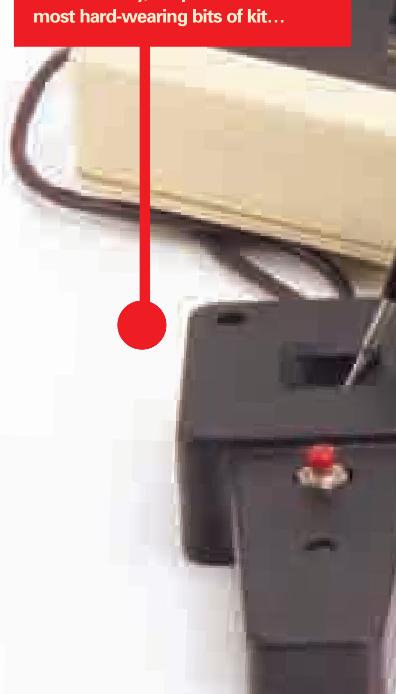
With the BBC hardware intended to be used as a demonstration machine for BBC Education software, it quickly became a regular on a number of BBC TV shows. Appearances on *The Computer Programme, Micro Live, Computers In Control* and *Making The Most Of The Micro* ensured that people all over the country knew about the machine. However, its talents stretched further than education and soon the BBC B was appearing in the likes of *Tomorrow's World, Beat The Teacher, The Adventure Game* and even *Doctor Who*, where it was also used to provide many of the show's special effects. Radio 4 went as far as having a programme called *The Chip Shop*, which regularly broadcast software over the airwaves for people to record onto cassette and then run through their computers.

BBC A-Okay

Of course, while the BBC reaped the benefits of the machine's educational prowess, the games front brought a new group of heroes to the fore – in particular,

JOYSTICK

Virtually all of the games and other utilities on the BBC used a keyboard set-up, but early analogue joysticks were also available if you wanted to really show off to your friends. Unfortunately, they weren't the most hard-wearing bits of kit...







BIG BROTHER, LITTLE BROTHER

As was the norm for new technology, the BBC B was a relatively expensive piece of kit. Retailing originally at £399, the price was justified by how much versatility the machine offered. However, it proved too much for some people, which prompted Acorn to release the Electron in 1983 – a slightly cut-down version of the machine that lost some of the features, but sold at half the price. Thanks to the company's reputation, the machine performed well above expectations – so much so, in fact, that Acorn couldn't cope with demand and subsequently lost out on a lot of sales. Two years later and things swung the other way thanks to improvements in technology that left the older BBC B some way behind the current standard. At this point Acorn introduced the BBC Master, which swiftly took over from the BBC B in terms of functionality – with better graphics modes and a variety of advanced features it was far superior to the original machine. Though it still enjoyed a strong uptake in schools, the computer's popularity on the home market was already waning, especially after the surge in competing machines like the ZX Spectrum and Atari ST.

Superior Software (which reigned supreme as the developer of choice for much of the BBC's life), Acornsoft and Program Power, which later became Micro Power. Between the three of them (as well as a number of other less successful companies) a remarkable number of games were released that allowed the BBC to be a worthy competitor in the burgeoning home computing market, and by the end of the machine's life over a million units had been sold across the country – far beyond the 12,000 sales predicted by Acorn.

GAMES

While the BBC initially made use of the old-school cassette method of loading, the more advanced users bought themselves disc drives. The drive ran huge 5.25-inch floppy discs that actually were floppy and whose boxes were twice as big.

SPECIFICATIONS

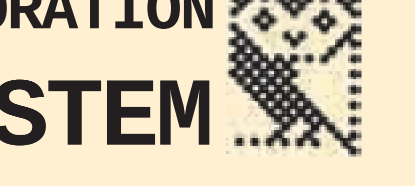
CPU: 2A 8-bit processor
CPU SPEED: 2MHz
MEMORY: 32Kb RAM, 32Kb in two 16Kb ROMs containing MOS and BASIC
RESOLUTION: Between 160x256 and 640x256, dependant on mode
COLOURS: Up to 16 (eight in two intensities), dependant on mode
SOUND: Three-channel, with one white-noise generator
STORAGE: Tape or 5.25-inch floppy disk
INPUT/OUTPUT: 1MHz expansion bus connector, additional processor port, user port, ZIF ROM socket connector, three DIP ROM sockets, parallel printer port, disk drive port, RS423 port, analogue joystick port, tape interface

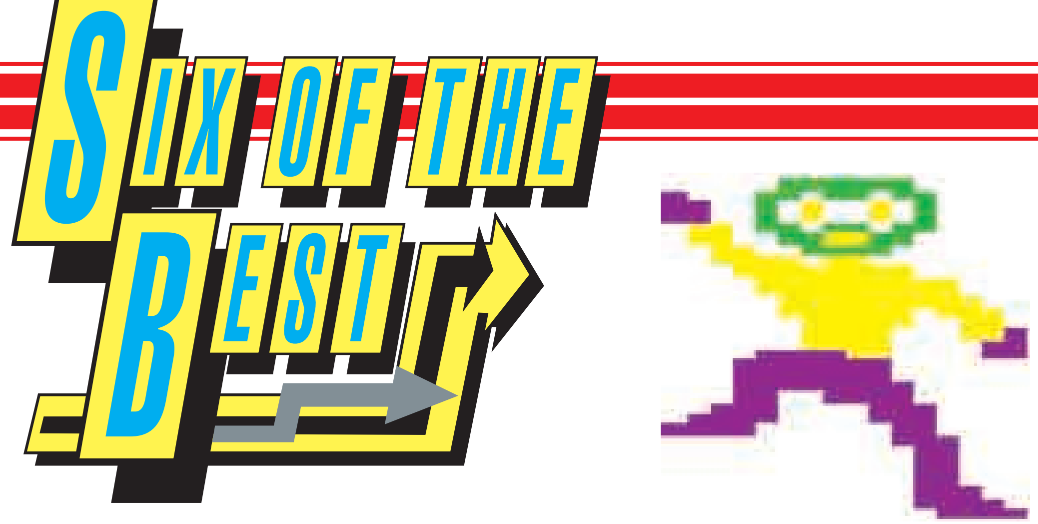


Classic Machine
BARBARIAN

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION





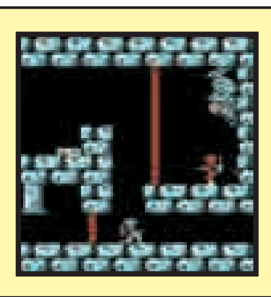


JUST AN EDUCATIONAL COMPUTER? WE BEG TO DIFFER. SOME OF OUR EARLIEST GAMING MEMORIES WERE THANKS TO ACORN'S GROUND-BREAKING MACHINE…

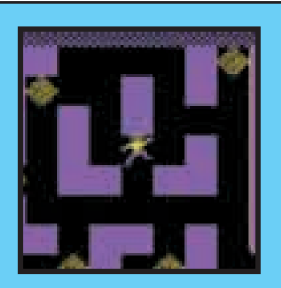
Codename: Droid

Developer: Superior Software
Year: 1987

Co-created by *Driver*'s Martin Edmondson, *Codename Droid* was the hugely improved sequel to *Stryker's Run*, a game that won many fans for its simple yet addictive gameplay. Whereas *Stryker's Run* consisted of a single (but incredibly long) horizontal scrolling level, *Codename Droid* was more of a platform adventure and allowed you to explore a remarkably large planet with multiple levels. It had the same level of difficulty as its predecessor, which meant that completing it was tough.



Repton



Developer: Superior Software
Year: 1984

It might have started out as an obvious clone of *Boulder Dash*, but *Repton* went on to be so much more. With the aim being to collect the valuable diamonds and avoid death (that came through falling boulders, insanely fast monsters or just sheer stupidity), the game's simplicity made it horribly addictive. But it wasn't until the third instalment in the series appeared – complete with a level designer that led to sequels such as *Life Of Repton* and *Repton Thru Time* – that it found its own identity.

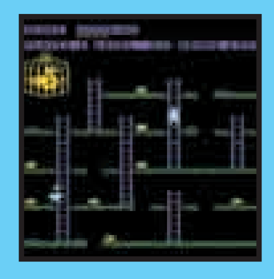
Granny's Garden

Developer: 4Mation
Year: 1983

Perhaps not one of the best BBC games ever made, but certainly one of the most memorable – there aren't many people around who used a BBC at school and didn't play *Granny's Garden*. Setting you the task of saving the six children of the captured king and queen, it featured some of the most bizarre logic for an educational game ever, and puzzles that were more about trial and error than skill. Of course, that doesn't mean we don't love it, even though we still can't finish it today without cheating.

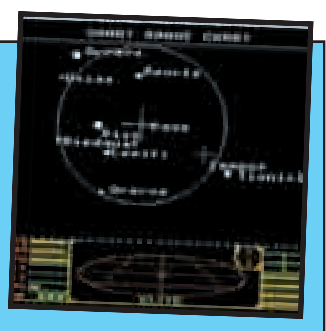


Chuckie Egg



Developer: A&F Software
Year: 1983

Appearing among the first wave of platform games, *Chuckie Egg* stands out because of its addictiveness and never-ending gameplay. The concept of collecting golden eggs without dropping off the screen or being killed by the marauding turkeys was fun, but the real hook was that if you died you knew it was entirely your fault rather than the game being unfair. A sequel followed, but the sacrifice of gameplay for improved visuals and sound meant that it was largely forgotten in favour of its predecessor.



Elite

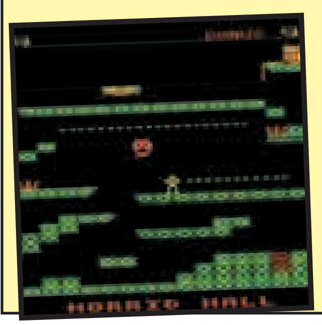
Developer: Acornsoft
Year: 1984

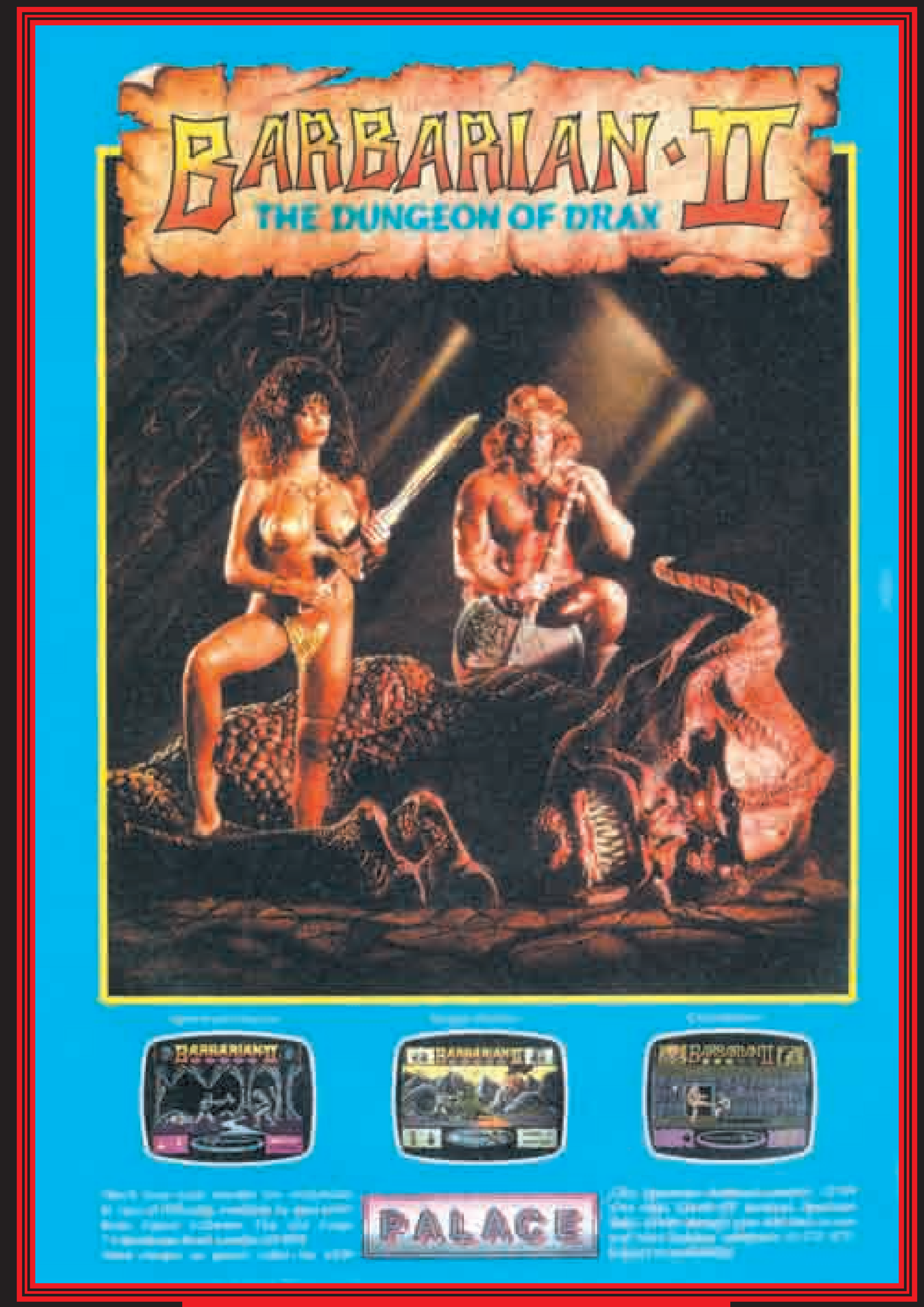
We couldn't list the greatest titles on the BBC without mentioning *Elite* – possibly one of the most revered games ever made. The game's capacity for free-roaming exploration and completely open-ended structure was something no-one had ever attempted to do with a videogame before and, as such, *Elite* rewrote the rules for games at the time. Superior Software (which went on to buy out Acornsoft) released an enhanced version of *Elite* for the BBC Master in 1986, before the game was ported to practically every other format.

Ghouls

Developer: Micro Power
Year: 1983

Along with *Castle Quest*, *Ghouls* rates as one of the better games produced by Micro Power, despite being tougher than old boots. Platform games were always hard in those days but whereas *Chuckie Egg* eased you in before making it tricky, *Ghouls* was just plain nasty – you were doing well if you made it past Level 3. Even worse, you only had to climb from the bottom of each level to the top (avoiding the ghosts, spikes and other devious traps along the way). Needless to say, much cursing was to be had here.





BARBARIAN II (Various Home Systems) Palace Software, 1988 – UK Advertisement

Classic Feature

Legend of Mystical

You may be intrigued by ninjas, but how much do you really know?

THERE'S A FASCINATION that surrounds ninjas. Due to the secretive nature of these seemingly ruthless assassins, it's almost impossible to separate fact from fiction, though documents exist mapping a clear history of a discipline that blends religion, nature and violence. For most of us, of course, the idea of a ninja has been shaped by the media – from movies to games, the classic image is often of a nimble, athletic figure, shrouded in black and darting across rooftops, invisible against the night sky. And that portrayal is accurate to an extent, but like so many other things, there's a lot more to being a ninja than meets the eye…

It's impossible to know the exact date when the first ninja was born, though ancient Chinese manuscripts refer to a group known as Lin Kuei, which roughly translates as Forest Demons. Set up as a secret society dedicated to protecting its people, the Lin Kuei form of combat was taught to Korea's Hwarang warriors, before reaching Japan in around 715AD. According to scriptures, a lone Lin Kuei ninja named En no Gyoja (or En no Ubasoku, depending on what you read) passed on the knowledge to groups of families living in rural mountain villages. And so the legend of the mystical ninja was born.

Over the next few centuries, the practice of ninjutsu became more widespread and evolved to incorporate a wider range of elements, including philosophy, Buddhism and, probably most importantly of all, the Japanese religion of Shinto. In Shinto, it's believed that there are many spiritual realms, including the Earth itself, and that all paths will eventually lead to the same destination. Because of this idea that we all end up in the same place, ninjas accepted every belief system, were able to defer to other religions, or simply work elements from other religions into their own unique belief system. This progressive form of the Japanese ninja became known as the Shinobi.

By the late 15th Century, ninjutsu was a way of life in Japan, and clans practising varying forms of the discipline were cropping up all around the Far East. Among some of the most famous ninjas during this period were Yagyu Jubei and his master Hattori Hanzo – two names featured in SNK's *Samurai Shodown*. Both were key figures in epic Japanese battles, though it



▲ SNK's *Ninja Masters* may have only been an average game, but at least the environments were fairly authentic.

▼ Although it focused on sword fighting, the *Samurai Shodown* series featured real ninjas from the history books.

NINJA



▼ SEGA's *Shinobi* is one of the most famous ninja videogames ever made. Shinobi was the name given to ninjas in Japan.

was their acquaintance, Ishikawa Goemon, whose demise was one of the most selfless acts in ninja lore.

Known as a legendary bandit hero, Goemon was famous for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor, though his final battle would cement his name in Japanese history books for a different reason. A feared warlord named Toyatomi Hideyoshi had been at war with Goemon's clan, and had slaughtered his wife and kidnapped his son, Gobei. To make matters worse, Hideyoshi-san had since become shogun (ruler of Japan). This infuriated the grieving Goemon. Intent on putting an end to Hideyoshi's rule and rescuing his son, Goemon set out in the dead of night and infiltrated Hideyoshi's castle. He located the target and was about to assassinate him when he was discovered and captured.

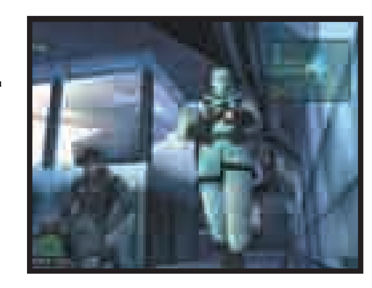
His fate was to be boiled alive in oil along with his son, and although he was aware that the end was nigh, Goemon knew he had to do everything to save his Gobei. Raising his arms above his head, the legendary bandit hero managed to hold the child above the surface of the scalding fat and away from harm. Meanwhile, Hattori Hanzo and his band of fellow ninjas had entered the castle. Although it was too late for Goemon by the time they found him, they arrived in time to save his son. A touching story, we're sure you'll agree, and one that's a million miles away from Konami's quirky *Goemon* games.

However, while Konami's interpretation of the ninja lifestyle is

> "Many people believed ninjas had magical powers, including the ability to make themselves invisible"

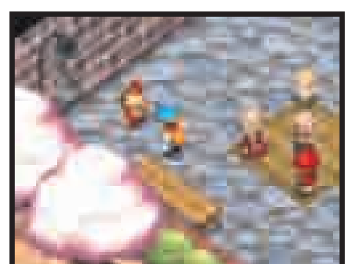
Ninjutsu Ingredients

Put all the elements from real-life ninjas into a videogame, and what do you get?



Stealth

Being able to move about undetected is pivotal to a ninja's survival. Well, it worked for Solid Snake on *Metal Gear Solid*, and now everyone's got the sneaky bug.



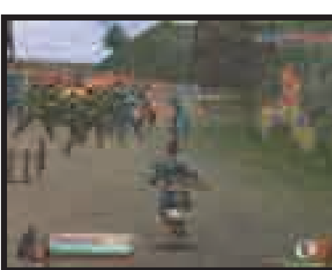
Farming

Far from the usual ninja image, most would have spent their days farming. Very much like in *Harvest Moon*, actually. Though *Harvest Moon* avoids the killing…



Weapons

Ninjas would have been fluent in a range of combat styles. Pretty much every weapon in *Soul Blade* would have been used at some point to dish out some hurt.



Battles

Protecting your homestead came with its perils. Most ninja clans would have seen *Dynasty Warriors*-style battles from time to time. But perhaps with fewer sequels.

The Perfect Ninja Game

Super Harvest Blade Warriors Online

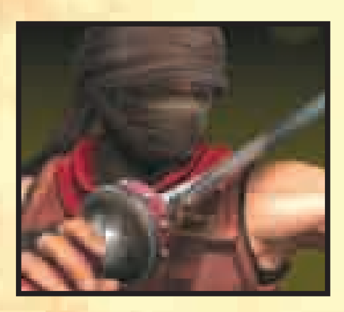
A strange as it might sound, *Super Harvest Blade Warriors Online* would probably be the ultimate ninja game. Playing as part of a clan, you would be required to protect your homestead from other clans, grow food to eat, practise your martial arts and even train your fellow players in new techniques. Now we just need someone to develop it…

about as surreal as they come, others are a lot more true to life. SEGA's *Shinobi*, for example, sticks closely to the activities of real ninjas that have been documented, right down to the scenery, native architecture, and selection of weaponry. But while swords and throwing stars are the most common types of weapons associated with ninja imagery, the range of blades and batons was actually a lot more diverse. Sickles, foot spikes and even bare hands were just as deadly as knives and nunchakus when used correctly.

Contrary to popular belief, though, ninjas weren't all vicious assassins – most were simply quiet country folk who used what they'd learned to protect their families and homesteads. And because ninjas were often swift and stealthy in their encounters, armoured warriors wouldn't always have time to defend themselves, resulting in many believing that ninjas had magical powers, including the ability to turn invisible. Naturally, the ninjas played along with this misconception, which in turn made their enemies more afraid of them.

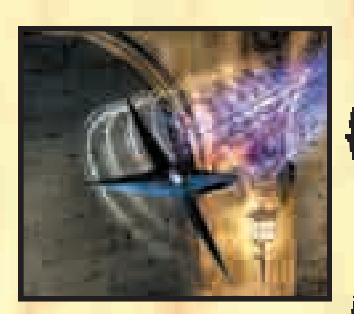
Ninja Weapons And Techniques

While swords, nunchakus, knives and throwing stars tend to be the weapons most associated with ninjas, the range was actually far broader in real life. Not only that, but each weapon required specific training if it was to be used properly. There were, of course, techniques that didn't rely on any sort of weapon at all, instead using just the bare hands to immobilise the enemy.



Toh-jutsu
(Art of the sword)
This would have incorporated a range of blades, some one-handed, others needing two.

Shurikenjutsu
(Art of throwing weapons)
This would have included various projectiles such as stars, knives and darts.





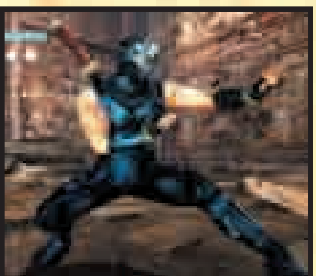
Bojutsu/Jojutsu
(Art of staff and stick)
This would have included mostly wooden weapons of various shapes and sizes.

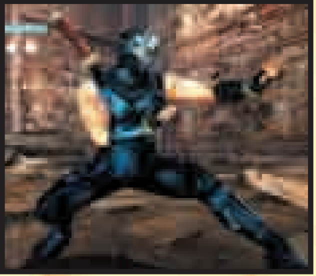
Kusari-jutsu
(Art of sickle crescent and a chain)
This included some of the trickiest weapons to use, such as scythes, chains and nunchakus.

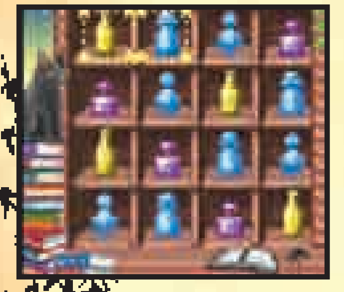


Sojutsu
(Art of the spear)
Perhaps not the most obvious ninja weapon, spears would have been barbed for extra damage.

Taijutsu
(Art of unarmed combat)
Even when ninjas were seemingly unarmed, they would often have had hand claws or foot spikes hidden from view.







Mikkyo
(Art of medicine)
Clans would have each had secret recipes for creating their own potions and poisons.

Intonjutsu
(Art of stealth)
Trainee ninjas would have been taught to move silently, while children were taught to dislocate their limbs.



Deadly

There were, however, a few genuine 'tricks' that ninjas had at their disposal. Many were taught to dislocate their limbs from a young age, helping them to escape if captured, while others would hack off their own limbs to free themselves rather than reveal their secrets to the enemy. But for all the individualities that different clans had, all were agreed on one simple belief – that they should always practise Toh Shin Do, which meant 'way of the pure-hearted sword'.

Many people aren't aware of how beautifully organic the Shinto religion is, or how many ninjas had a true appreciation for nature. Instead, the focus tends to be on all these violent weapons and dislocated limbs – subjects that don't make for good family viewing. Over the years, movie directors and game developers have had to adhere to strict guidelines regarding what imagery can be shown; since the Seventies, for example, nunchakus have always been a touchy subject. Following the Bruce Lee movie *Enter The Dragon* the British Board Of Film Classification (BBFC) called for certain weapons, including nunchakus, to be removed from films to discourage people from constructing their own weapons and injuring themselves and others.

These guidelines have since been relaxed, though, and nunchakus are once again appearing on the silver screen. Sue Clark, the BBFC's head of press and publicity, says the rules were far-reaching. "The last head of the BBFC, James Ferman, decided that nunchakus should not be on shown at all on film. This led to a number of scenes being deleted from all of Bruce Lee's films and even a scene in one of the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* movies in which a turtle used a string of sausages like nunchakus," she explains. "Recently, however, we've changed our policy. Our new





▼ *Strider* wasn't the most realistic ninja game ever made, but this Capcom classic remains a firm favourite with the fans.

head, Robin Duvall, looked into it and decided that the guidelines should be relaxed. Nunchakus aren't really a typical weapon of choice – we're more concerned with the use of knives in films with lower classification ratings, as they're so easily available." Since the change in policy, all of Bruce Lee's films have been re-released with the deleted scenes reinstated.

Where animated ninjas are concerned, on the other hand, the use of nunchakus has always been an even greyer area. Certainly, many early anime movies featuring them were edited for their European releases, though similar imagery in videogames has often managed to slip through the net. Sculptured Software's *Ninja* on C64, released in 1986, featured nunchakus on the title screen and box art, for instance, while Konami's *Turtles* games included Michelangelo's nunchakus uncut in any way. More recently, Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* for the Xbox has proved that the censors have become even more relaxed, though rumour has it that the European release won't feature any of the bloody decapitations seen in the import game.

Legends

It seems, then, that although the videogame interpretation of the ninja, including the weaponry and combat, is slowly getting closer to how real ninjas would have appeared, there's still a lot to be learned when it comes to lifestyle and religion. Working as part of a ninja team in a mission-based online game could certainly offer the sort of experience fairly close to the life of a real ninja. Just imagine having to protect your homestead from a rival clan of online gamers, each displaying their own unique range of ninja moves – moves that gamers had developed and taught to one another. Of course, if a game were to truly represent the life of a ninja, you'd probably spend much of your time farming. So perhaps something like *Harvest Moon* would be more in order, though whether it would have the same appeal is another matter…

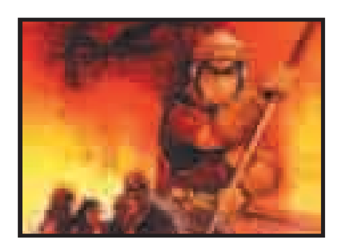


▲ Huge fireballs may not be particularly realistic, but many people believed ninjas had such mysterious powers.

Digital Ninjas

We look at the attributes of four of our favourite videogame ninjas.

Name: Sho Musashi
Game: Shinobi X
Format: Saturn



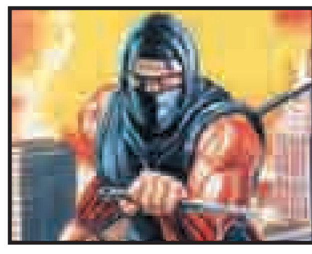
Charisma: 7 – Sho looks great and he's out to save his sister. The perfect gentleman.
Agility: 7 – He has the ability to jump and flip, and he can hang onto branches.
Stealth: 6 – He's not particularly well camouflaged, but he's very nimble.
Weapons: 6 – His standard weapon is a sword, though he also has throwing stars.
Magic: 6 – Mystical gods can be summoned, making Sho's moves extra powerful.
Authenticity: 6 – He certainly looks the part, though his clothes are more vibrant than a real ninja.

Name: Strider Hiryu
Game: Strider
Format: Multi



Charisma: 7 – Larger than life and dressed in blue and red, Strider is memorable at the very least.
Agility: 8 – Able to scale walls and leap enormous gaps, he's certainly very nimble.
Stealth: 4 – Strider isn't really about stealth – he's far too feisty for that.
Weapons: 3 – Armed only with his sword, Strider isn't a particularly versatile character,
Magic: 0 – Strider is all about combat – magic doesn't even come into it.
Authenticity: 4 – Strider is far too colourful to be a real ninja, though he certainly gives it a good go.

Name: Ryu Hayabusa
Game: Ninja Gaiden (Dead Or Alive)
Format: Multi



Charisma: 5 – Ryu is a man of mystery, and also extremely stylish.
Agility: 9 – He's become more nimble as the years have gone on. He can even run up walls.
Stealth: 6 – Ryu's speed means that he can still take foes by surprise.
Weapons: 10 – With a huge arsenal of weapons, Ryu is certainly a versatile fighter.
Magic: 8 – Ryu is capable of various magic spells, though few are that impressive.
Authenticity: He looks sleek, but his costume is a little too well fitting.

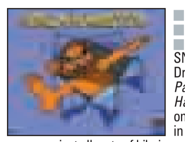
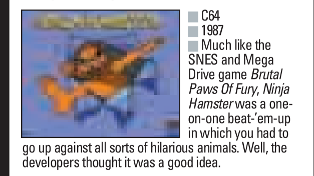
Name: Goemon
Game: Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
Format: SNES



Charisma: 10 – Goemon is so popular that he's got a whole army of friends to help him out.
Agility: 7 – Not the most nimble of ninjas, but he'll have a go.
Stealth: 4 – He's hardly stealthy, but many of his enemies are too stupid to notice him anyway.
Weapons: 8 – Goemon has a weapon suited to every situation.
Magic: 7 – Goemon lives in a land filled with dragons and mythical creatures – magic is all around.
Authenticity: 6 – He may not look like a real ninja, but Goemon is based on a real-life hero.

Ninja

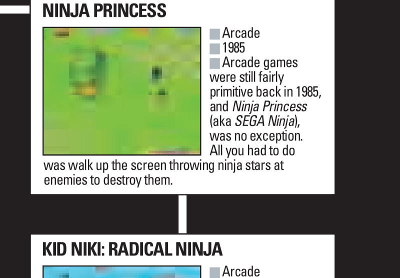
family tree


Even though the ancient art of ninjutsu is often shrouded in secrecy, this deadly form of combat has been depicted in videogames for the last 20 years. Often frowned upon by the censors, there's something thrilling about the thought of being a silent assassin, slipping over rooftops in the dead of night…

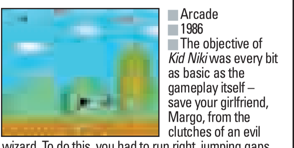
CUTESY

NINJA PRINCESS



- Arcade
- 1985
- Arcade games were still fairly primitive back in 1985, and *Ninja Princess* (aka *SEGA Ninja*), was no exception. All you had to do was walk up the screen throwing ninja stars at enemies to destroy them.

KID NIKI: RADICAL NINJA

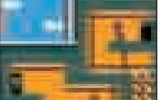


- Arcade
- 1986
- The objective of *Kid Niki* was every bit as basic as the gameplay itself – save your girlfriend, Margo, from the clutches of an evil wizard. To do this, you had to run right, jumping gaps and hitting things.

NINJA KID

- NES
- 1988
- Cutesy and minimalist, this fun little NES game was a basic action platformer in which the objective was simply to work your way through a number of themed shrines. Hardly a classic, but fun all the same.

ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD



- Master System
- 1990
- Alex Kidd was the Master System's answer to Mario and a number of games were released in the series, each with a different theme. This one featured ninjas and had a decidedly Eastern atmosphere, right down to the cutesy assassins.

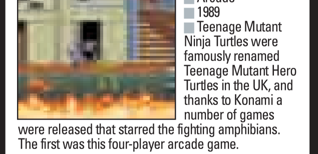
ANIMALS



NINJA HAMSTER

- C64
- 1987
- Much like the SNES and Mega Drive game *Brutal Paws Of Fury*, *Ninja Hamster* was a one-on-one beat-'em-up in which you had to go up against all sorts of hilarious animals. Well, the developers thought it was a good idea.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (SERIES)



- Arcade
- 1989
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were famously renamed Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles in the UK, and thanks to Konami a number of games were released that starred the fighting amphibians. The first was this four-player arcade game.

NINJA

- C64
- 1984
- As a text adventure, this early offering gave players the opportunity to see life through the eyes of a ninja. It was obviously limited due to the technology of the time, but still enjoyable and fairly atmospheric.

THE NINJA



- Master System
- 1986
- Despite its more realistic visuals, *The Ninja*'s gameplay was almost identical to *Ninja Princess* (developed by SEGA a year earlier). Simplistic to play, both action buttons fired darts at your sneaky enemies.

THE LAST NINJA (SERIES)

- Multi
- 1987
- Thanks to System 3's brilliant design, *The Last Ninja* sold over two million copies worldwide. What was interesting was that the company responsible was British, yet Japanese culture had been captured perfectly.

THE NINJA WARRIORS

- Arcade
- 1987
- Though much like any other scrolling slash-'em-up, this was unique in that it used three screens rather than one. What this meant was that you could see enemies approaching from further away than other similar titles.

SHINOBI

- Arcade
- 1987
- One of the best known ninja games ever, *Shinobi* blended combat and platform action perfectly. Although it started off in the arcade, numerous follow-ups were released across a range of formats.

NINJA MASSACRE

- C64
- 1989
- Not to be mixed up with the fictitious *Ninja Mascara*, *Ninja Massacre* was almost identical to *Gauntlet*. The main difference was that all the wizards and suchlike had been replaced with ninjas. But that was obvious really.

NINJA GAIDEN

- Arcade
- 1988
- Not massively different from *Shinobi* as far as gameplay went, Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* stood out because of its lush visuals. Two follow-ups were later developed and ported across to the NES.

REVENGE OF SHINOBI

- Mega Drive
- 1988
- Following on from the arcade release of *Shinobi*, this Mega Drive-exclusive title lacked the ingenuity of its predecessor. Gameplay was speedy and responsive, but many found the game to be a little too difficult.

STRIDER

- Arcade
- 1989
- Capcom's answer to *Shinobi*, and a superb game in its own right. With a bold and vibrant visual style and tidy gameplay, *Strider* has become a cult classic and is a game that all hardcore gamers should play.

SHADOW DANCER

- Arcade
- 1989
- A *Shinobi* spin-off, *Shadow Dancer* had a fresher, more vibrant approach to ninjas than *Shinobi* had shown two years earlier. What's more, the main character had a pet dog that helped him destroy the bad guys.

NINJA COMBAT

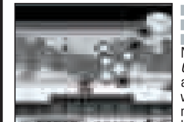
- Arcade
- 1990
- Hardly the most authentic ninja game ever created, *Ninja Combat* was a typical Neo-Geo action game in which huge, colourful enemies were destroyed with a flurry of over-the-top special moves.

ONE ON ONE

NINJA

- C64
- 1986
- A little more like some of the later ninja games, the 1986 release of *Ninja* on the C64 gave players the opportunity to beat up waves of thugs. Simple in its execution, the game hinted at what was to come.

NINJA GAIDEN SHADOW



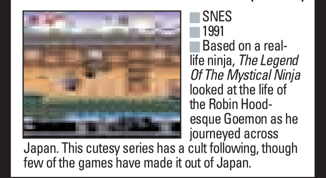
- Game Boy
- 1991
- Like so many other NES games, *Ninja Gaiden* was cut down and turned black and white for Nintendo's monochrome handheld. Predictably, much of the splendour was lost in the translation, but the overall results were satisfactory.

CAVEMAN NINJA (SERIES)



- Arcade
- 1991
- Data East's *Caveman Ninja* starred cavemen Joe and Mac – who weren't really ninjas at all – as they went on an adventure to locate the missing Cavebabes. The follow-up saw the main characters transformed into monkeys.

LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA (SERIES)



- SNES
- 1991
- Based on a real-life ninja, *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* looked at the life of the Robin Hood-esque Goemon as he journeyed across Japan. This cutesy series has a cult following, though few of the games have made it out of Japan.

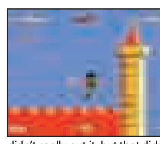
MORTAL KOMBAT (SERIES)

- Arcade
- 1992
- Although real ninjas almost certainly wouldn't wear anything as vivid as Scorpion and Sub-Zero's tunics, the imagery was close enough to the real thing to get by. The follow-ups featured additional ninjas in many different colours.

NINJA COMMANDO

- Arcade
- 1992
- A little like *Cabal*, this up-screen shooter involved nothing more than running along, taking out bad guys. Like so many other Neo-Geo games the imagery was larger than life and the colours sickeningly garish.

ZOOL





- Amiga
- 1993
- This was a straightforward platform shoot-'em-up with a supposedly cool character. A ninja ant from the Nth Dimension, Zool didn't really cut it, but that didn't stop the game from getting rave reviews.

NINJA BASEBALL BAT MAN

- Arcade
- 1993
- Another 'ninja' game starring a character that wasn't really a ninja at all. Armed only with a baseball bat, Ninja Baseball Bat Man's main weapon of choice was, unsurprisingly, his baseball bat. Good for destroying mutant baseballs.

SAMURAI SHODOWN

- Arcade
- 1993
- Despite its title, *Samurai Shodown* featured a selection of fighting styles, including ninjutsu. Interestingly, Hattori Hanzo and Yagyu Jubei were actually based on real-life ninjas from Japanese historical documents.

VIRTUA FIGHTER (SERIES)

- Arcade
- 1993
- As the first real three-dimensional fighting game, *Virtua Fighter* had a lot to prove. Thankfully, Yu Suzuki's world-famous title realistically portrayed many fighting styles, including ninja-favourite ninjutsu.

NINJA GAIDEN TRILOGY

- SNES
- 1995
- Featuring the three NES games, this SNES collection was a nice addition to any console owner's library. While the games were still extremely playable, though, the graphical updates didn't really take advantage of the hardware.

SHINOBI X

- Saturn
- 1995
- While the gameplay remained almost identical to the original arcade game, this Saturn exclusive featured digitised actors like those in *Mortal Kombat*. It also made good use of the Saturn's sprite-manipulation techniques.

ZERO THE KAMIKAZE SQUIRREL



- Multi
- 1995
- Although this was much like any other platform game as far as gameplay went, the visuals were stylised to look Japanese. The main character himself wore a ninja mask and flitted about in a very nimble way.

REVIVALS

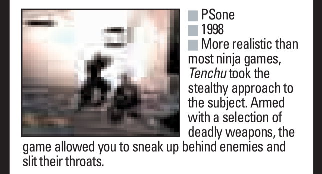
NINJA MASTERS

- Arcade
- 1996
- Much the same as any other one-on-one beat-'em-up, *Ninja Masters* didn't really stand out from the crowd. Certainly compared to *Samurai Shodown*, this lacked style, atmosphere and authenticity. Playable, but nothing special.

DEAD OR ALIVE (SERIES)

- Arcade
- 1996
- Running on SEGA's Model 2 arcade board, *Dead Or Alive* had a lot in common with *Virtua Fighter 2*. It did, however, feature infamously wobbly bosoms and Ryu Hayabusa from *Ninja Gaiden*.

TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS



- PSone
- 1998
- More realistic than most ninja games, *Tenchu* took the stealthy approach to the subject. Armed with a selection of deadly weapons, the game allowed you to sneak up behind enemies and slit their throats.

REVIVALS

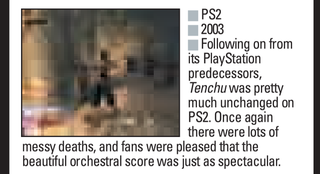
NINJA ASSAULT

- Arcade
- 2000
- Coming from the makers of *Time Crisis*, this ninja-filled game also featured guns. The objective was simply to shoot the sword-wielding warriors before they got the opportunity to slit your throat.

SHINOBI

- PS2
- 2002
- After a seven-year absence, *Shinobi* returned to the world of videogames in glorious 3D. Well, we say glorious, but in all honesty the visuals were a bit disappointing really. It was, however, good fun to play.

TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN

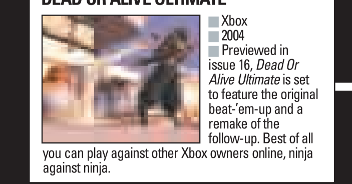


- PS2
- 2003
- Following on from its PlayStation predecessors, *Tenchu* was pretty much unchanged on PS2. Once again there were lots of messy deaths, and fans were pleased that the beautiful orchestral score was just as spectacular.

KUNG-FU CHAOS

- Xbox
- 2003
- Much like Capcom's *Power Stone* on the Dreamcast, *Kung Fu Chaos* allowed its cutesy characters to interact with the scenery. Here, however, the characters had a comedy Eastern flavour to them.

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE



- Xbox
- 2004
- Previewed in issue 16, *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* is set to feature the original beat-'em-up and a remake of the follow-up. Best of all you can play against other Xbox owners online, ninja against ninja.

NINJA GAIDEN

- Xbox
- 2004
- Although Tecmo's latest Xbox offering has taken the action option over stealth, it portrays the path of a true Japanese ninja better than most other games. And as it's running on an enhanced *DOA* engine it looks lovely too.

NIGHTSHADE

- PS2
- 2004
- No *Shinobi* games for seven years, and then we get two of them in 12 months. This latest offering is a straight follow-on from the 2003 PlayStation2 game, though *Nightshade* features a female lead character.

TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

- Xbox
- 2004
- Virtually indistinguishable from the 2003 release of *Wrath Of Heaven* on PS2, *Return From Darkness* will give Xbox owners the opportunity to partake in a little stealth ninja action. What's more, it can be played online.

I-NINJA



- PS2
- 2004
- The visuals might be minimalist, but Argonaut/Namco's action platformer is actually a very playable little game. Starring a cutesy ninja, progression revolves around traditional platform elements and enjoyable puzzles.

Sam & Max Hit the Road



FORGET PIRATES OR EVIL TENTACLES – LUCASARTS' FINEST HOUR STARRED A WISECRACKING DOG AND A PSYCHOPATHIC RABBIT. HONESTLY…

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts
Release: 1993
Format: PC

With games like *Maniac Mansion, Zak McKraken And The Alien Mindbenders* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* already proving huge successes with PC gamers in the late Eighties and early Nineties, it was clear to LucasArts that point-and-click adventures were a big thing. This may have had something to do with the revolutionary new process (for the time) that the company had taken to using for its adventure games. Created to power the original *Maniac Mansion*, the SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) engine was initially programmed by Lucasfilm Games' employees Ron Gilbert and Aric Wilmunder after Gilbert decided he'd had enough of adventure games that had user-unfriendly environments and made dying repeatedly part of the process of solving puzzles.

SCUMM got around this by allowing gamers to build their own sentences using a graphical interface, rather than having to type things and hope the game understood; verbs (provided by the game's word interface) and nouns (items in the player's inventory or near them on screen) could be combined to try virtually anything, without causing hair-pulling frustration.

While the technology was slowly improving, LucasArts decided it also needed some fresh blood to create characters worthy of becoming the stars of its adventures. Having already produced two *Monkey Island* games and with *Day Of The Tentacle* updating the *Maniac Mansion* licence, it was time for some new ideas, and for that LucasArts looked within its own ranks. Enter Steve Purcell – animator on a number of projects for LucasArts and the man behind a pair of cult comic book characters called Sam and Max. Purcell had masterminded the adventures of Sam (a smart-talking dog detective in a suit) and Max (his three-foot-high hyperactive and slightly sociopathic rabbit sidekick) since 1987 when their first 32-page comic appeared, although the man himself admits to pinching the original characters from his younger brother during childhood.

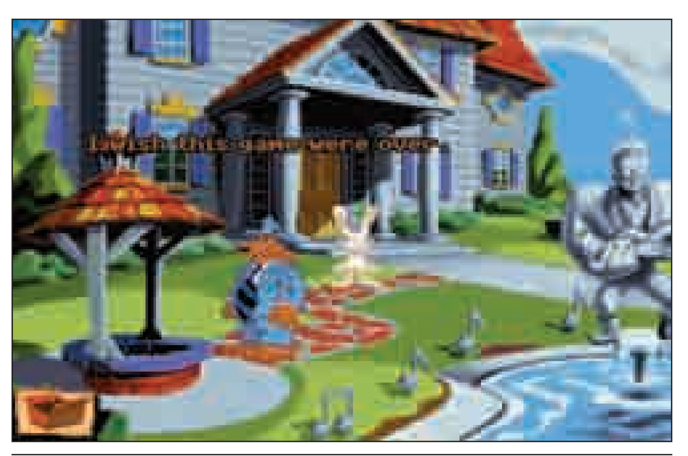


▲ Most of the characters you'll meet are helpful in a cryptic sort of way if you ply them with enough candy.

Thanks to a combination of slapstick humour, bizarre antics and inadvertent crime-solving, Sam and Max hit people's funny bones, but it was only through a chance invitation to create an original comic strip for a LucasArts newsletter that Purcell's creations were let into the Lucas fold. Parodies of *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones* and other classic LucasArts games followed, which no doubt helped to seal the deal when the time came for the idea of a game based on the troublesome twosome.



▲ Max has plenty of deep-seated psychopathic tendencies – he just loves pounding on virtually anyone.



▲ Sam's overly cynical view of the world makes an appearance more than once during your adventure…

MADE FOR TELEVISION

Sam & Max Hit The Road **wasn't the only way in which the crime-fighting pair managed to make their mark outside of the world of comic books. Late in 1997, a Canadian animation company called Nelvana produced a 13-episode series of *Sam And Max: Freelance Police* featuring the duo's adventures. The pair visited a restaurant run by aliens, misused a wristwatch capable of time travel, fought an arch nemesis called Mack Salmon – all with the help of The Geek, a teenage genius who lived in their basement. While the cartoon was both strange and hilarious, Fox cancelled it after just one run. However, it can still be found on video (NTSC only, sadly), and clips from the series are lurking on the internet.**







And so *Sam & Max Hit The Road* was born. Working closely with the directing and producing talents of Sean Clarke and Mike Stemmle, Purcell's twisted humour was turned into a hugely popular point-and-click adventure. The game saw everyone's favourite freelance police officers take on the case of Bruno the Bigfoot, who has gone missing from the local carnival and appears to have taken the show's next-best freak, Trixie the Giraffe-Necked Girl, with him.

Tracking down the pair takes Sam and Max to plenty of strange locations all over America including the World's Largest Ball Of Twine, the Mystery Vortex, Bumpusville (home of renowned country and western singer Conrad Bumpus) and many more besides. However, it was the way that the game managed to capture the madcap style of the comic book while maintaining the point-and-click stylings of previous LucasArts adventures that made *Hit The Road* so popular with fans of both games and comics – rarely has a game featured so many laugh-out-loud moments without becoming stale or repetitive.

The game also heralded an improvement in the ageing SCUMM engine. Originally using simple text to show the player's verb options and inventory, the engine had improved through games like *Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle* to move into visual representations for items that the player had to hand – however, the verb menu remained in text form. In *Hit The Road*, though, LucasArts evolved the engine into a completely visual-driven form by introducing a cycling verb icon; actions like Use, Look At, Talk To, Walk To and Pick Up were changed into visual representations and combined into a single pointer, which could be changed simply by hitting the right mouse button. It might have been a minor tweak, but it made playing *Hit The Road* much easier – something that you'd be thankful for if you'd ever experienced the game's incredibly twisted logic.

Sadly, if you've been looking forward to any more gaming adventures with Sam and Max, you're going to have a long wait. Despite being longed for by many gamers, development of the promised sequel – *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* – has been cancelled by LucasArts. "After careful evaluation of current marketplace realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC," said Mike Nelson, acting general manager and VP of finance and operations at LucasArts. Fair enough, you might think, but then if the alternative is the continued milking of the *Star Wars* licence until the end of time, we know which one we'd rather have. We reckon there's still life in the old dog (and rabbit) yet.

WOT, NO SEQUEL?

With the news that LucasArts has canned the upcoming sequel to *Hit The Road*, it should come as no surprise that dedicated fans are in uproar. Petitions have sprung up all over the internet and emails of complaint have been pouring into LucasArts' mailbox. According to the unofficial Sam and Max fan website (www.samandmax.net), the duo's creator, Steve Purcell, isn't exactly happy about the decision either. "I'm extremely frustrated and disappointed," he said, "especially for the team who have devoted so much effort and creativity to Sam and Max. It's a shame to think that their accomplishments, as well as the goodwill that has been growing in the gaming press toward this project, will all go to waste due to this short-sighted decision." You know, we couldn't have put it better ourselves…

Presentation: A hilarious rollercoaster ride from beginning to end	**95%**
Graphics The crazy world of Sam and Max never looked so good	**92%**
Sound The voiceover on the CD version serves to make things better	**93%**
Gameplay Twisted comedy, but with twisted puzzles too – very tricky	**91%**
Lifespan If you can work out the brain-bending puzzles, it's over too quickly	**88%**
OVERALL	**94%**

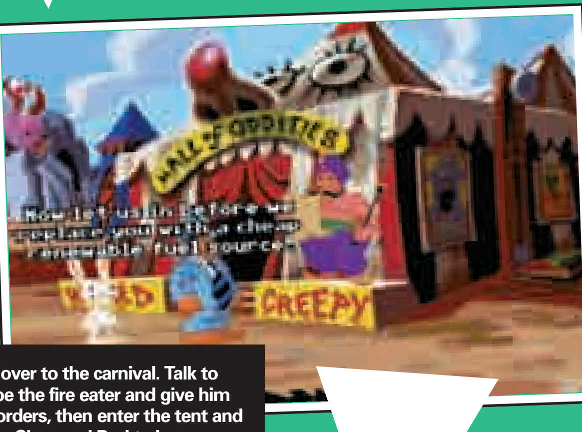


Sam & Max Hit The Road

The logic behind many of LucasArts' point-and-click adventures was always rather twisted, but Sam & Max Hit The Road took things to an entirely new level. Some of the things you need to do are just crazy...

START

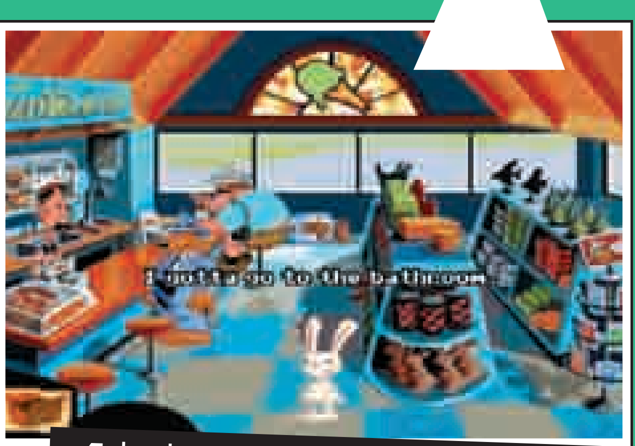
1 Once the credits are over, search the mouse hole on the rear wall for some cash, then walk right and check the closet for a Blacklight Bulb. Leave your office and head out onto the street (pushing the man off the balcony on the way), allowing Max to 'interrogate' the stray cat to get your orders.



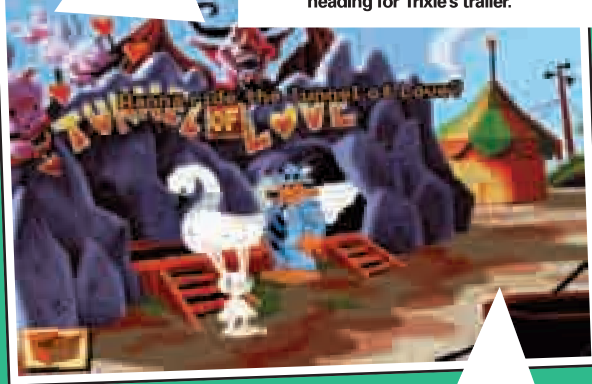
2 Drive over to the carnival. Talk to Flambe the fire eater and give him your orders, then enter the tent and chat to Shep and Burl to learn about the case – Bruno the Sasquatch has escaped! Grab the Sasquatch Hair from the floor and the Hand in a jar on the pedestal before using the exit on the right.



3 Play the Wak-A-Rat game and win to get the Flashlight – combine this with the Blacklight Bulb. Grab the nearby Fishbowl Lens, then ride the Cone Of Tragedy. Check your inventory and talk to the man to get a Claim Ticket. Take this over to the Lost And Found to get all your stuff back again.



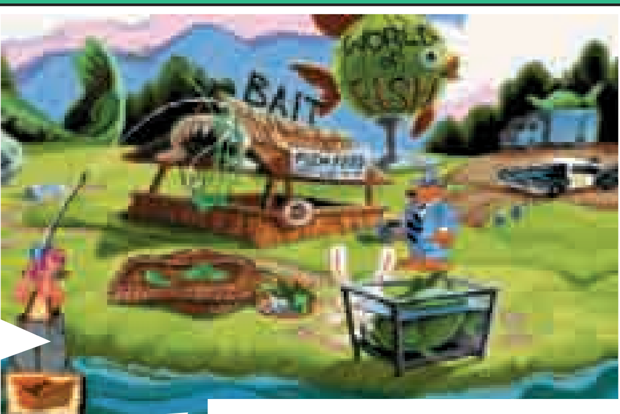
4 Jump in your car and drive to Snuckey's. Go inside and grab some Candy from the shelf, then ask the clerk to open your jar for you. When Max needs the toilet, get the Key from the clerk and follow Max outside – pick up the cup and talk to Max when he returns to get the Key Rasp.



5 Back at the carnival, ride the Tunnel Of Love and use the Flashlight to reveal a Fuse Box. Use Max on it to stop the ride, then check out the Dummy on the right to open a door. Go through and meet Doug, asking him about Bruno – give him the Candy to get a Crowbar before heading for Trixie's trailer.



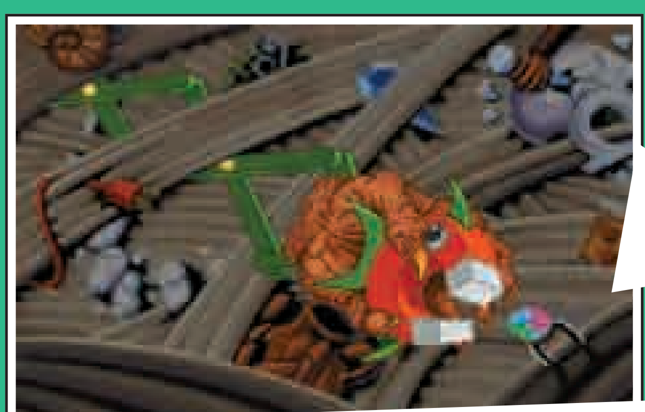
6 Break in with the Crowbar and grab the costume from the chest, as well as the Golf Scorecard from the closet. Leave and drive to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine – use the tram to get to the restaurant, then talk to the strange man to get a Bent Spanner before leaving again.



7 Drive to the World Of Fish and pick up the bucket by the bait hut, then use the Spanner on the giant plastic fish and jump inside to return to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine. Use Max on the loose piece of string before the chef comes back, then drive over to the Gator Golf Emporium.



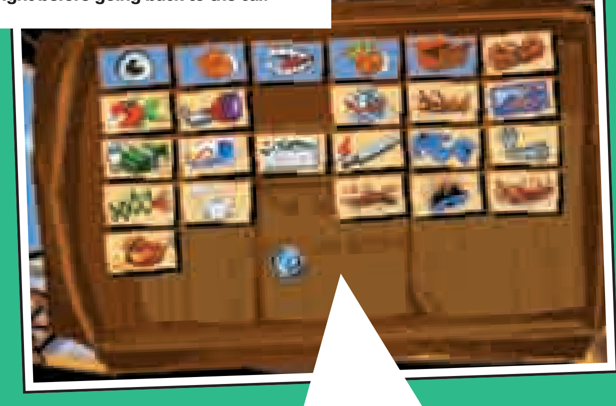
8 Pick up the broken Golf Ball Retriever by the Pro Shop, then go to the Driving Range. Swap the golf balls for your bucket of fish, then hit fish into the water to create a path of alligators over to the Dunk The Beast tank. Save Max to get more Sasquatch Hair, then open the hatch to get a Snow Globe.



9 Return to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine, entering the museum at the bottom. Use the Severed Hand on the Golf Ball Retriever, then the Fridge Magnet on the Severed Hand – use all this on the Ball of Twine to find a Mood Ring hidden inside, then leave and drive over to the Mystery Vortex.



10 Step through the mirror to enter a room full of magnets – play with these to activate different exits until you meet Shuv-Oohl. Talk about Bruno, then give him the Mood Ring to get some Mystic Mole Man Powder. Go through the curtains to get more Sasquatch Hair before leaving again.



11 Go to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine again and head for the restaurant. Use the Loose Wires with the Binoculars, then the Fishbowl Lens, before looking through them – find Frog Rock that Shuv-Oohl mentioned by moving the Binoculars left and right before going back to the car.

12 Go to Frog Rock and use the three pieces of Sasquatch Hair on the rock, then sprinkle it with Mystic Mole Powder to reveal Bumpusville on your map. This is where the rather nasty Elvis-a-like Conroy is holding Bruno and Trixie captive, but saving them isn't going to be easy… Did you really think it would be?

FINISH…?





Find a clock, turn it back, then play some old games and review them by today's standards. That's what we've done with three classic titles, but can these games stand up against the current cream of the console crop?

Final Fight

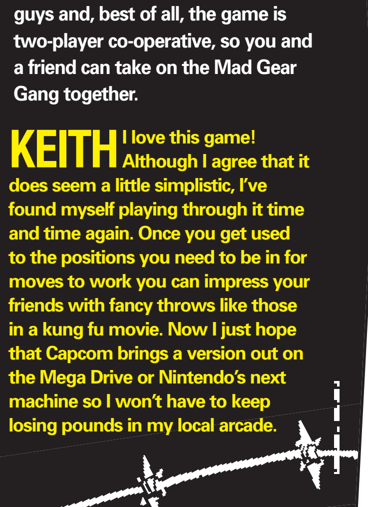
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release: 1989
Price: 20p per play

Capcom has made a name for itself over the past couple of years. Games like *Mega Man* and *1943* have proved that it can produce polished titles in a variety of genres, and with *Final Fight*, that run of quality looks set to continue. Running on the new CPS chip, *Final Fight* looks stunning.

You play as either Guy, Cody or Haggar and use a selection of kicks, punches and throws to defeat members of the Mad Gear Gang, whose leader has kidnapped Haggar's daughter, Jessica. In your pursuit to locate her, you'll find yourself swaggering around the suburbs of Metro City, where thugs are waiting around every corner to clobber you. Thankfully, you can pick up knives and even Molotov cocktails to help you duff up the bad guys and, best of all, the game is two-player co-operative, so you and a friend can take on the Mad Gear Gang together.

Although some players may find it simplistic, you only need to hit one button to perform a combo. However, by approaching enemies from different angles it's possible to perform numerous different throws, including piledrivers and back drops. What's more, each fighter has their own style that adds variety to the proceedings. Cody is the all-rounder, Guy is athletic and nimble, and Haggar is slow but extremely strong. This increases the longevity considerably, as you can play through three times using different moves and tactics.

It's not every day that a title as great-looking as *Final Fight* comes along, but under the fancy visuals there's little here that hasn't been done before. The locations look fantastic, but the gameplay isn't enhanced by the graphics in any way – once you've played through the first level there are virtually no surprises. Of course, as an arcade game this does what it needs to do, just don't expect too much depth.



KEITH I love this game! Although I agree that it does seem a little simplistic, I've found myself playing through it time and time again. Once you get used to the positions you need to be in for moves to work you can impress your friends with fancy throws like those in a kung fu movie. Now I just hope that Capcom brings a version out on the Mega Drive or Nintendo's next machine so I won't have to keep losing pounds in my local arcade.

In Retrospect

Final Fight set the standards for scrolling beat-'em-ups, and although better examples came along later, this was a surprisingly polished arcade offering for the time. The game was later ported to the SNES, though Guy had been removed from the roster. Not enough memory, perhaps?

Presentation:	92%
Graphics:	95%
Sound:	91%
Gameplay	92%
Lifespan	85%
OVERALL	**89%**



Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release: 1981
Price: 10p per play

With *Space Invaders* becoming more popular than Taito could have predicted, it was inevitable that games such as *Moon Cresta* would try and follow in its footsteps. Namco's *Galaxian* was another contender in this space war and while it proved to be a worthy addition to the genre genre, it couldn't quite topple *Space Invaders*. So how will its sequel, *Galaga*, fare?

Yet again, *Galaga* puts you in control of one ship fending off an entire alien fleet. The Galagan ships attack with kamikaze attacks, missiles or tractor beams. It's the latter that can be turned to your advantage – if the Galagan Commander catches your ship in his tractor beam, you have the chance to earn your ship back and bolster your firepower by shooting him down. This comes in handy for the additional challenging stages; bonus rounds that give you a chance to

Publisher: Renegade
Developer: Bitmap Brothers
Release: 1993
Price: £19.99

Saving the world on our own? Nonsense – the least we'd do is grab a friend before setting off into the unknown. Few games have allowed us to do just that thus far; even fewer have done it with the style and verve of *The Chaos Engine*.

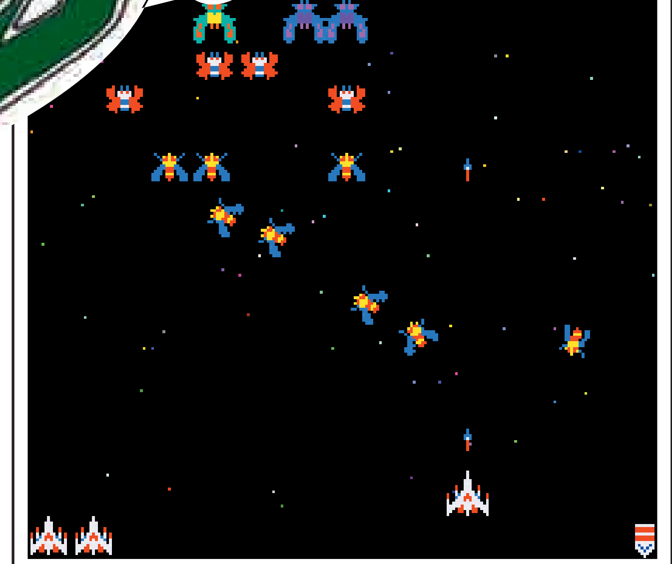
In Retrospect

Over a decade later, *Chaos Engine*'s industrial setting looks passé but, crucially, the action has kept its edge. It's also interesting to see that its influence is present in contemporary games – *Baldur's Gate* and *Dungeons & Dragons* may have an RPG slant but they share the same 'slow' pace and co-operative elements.



In Retrospect

Galaga still stands proud alongside *Space Invaders*, and rightfully so, as it remains eminently playable today. It may be too simple for some but it's great if you're an obsessive high-score chaser.



RYAN I hate space shoot-'em-up games. By their very nature, they quickly become monotonous as you impassively clear wave after wave of enemies with little incentive to continue. Yet *Galaga* escapes that trap simply by infusing personality into proceedings, with buoyant enemies, a great victory song and variation. It kept me entranced long enough to unravel the fiendish high-score challenge and once I found that… well, *Galaga* proved the perfect tonic to quell my loathing of the genre.

bump up your score and also help break up the relentless action.

Expanding on its predecessor's ideas with the enemy ships descending into the formation rather than appearing straight away at the start of each stage, it retains the bright, vibrant feel of *Galaxian*. Apart from a delightful victory jingle there's no music in the game, although the lively sound effects make up for it. *Galaga* really excels by sucking you into a high-score pursuit, thanks to the tough challenge and various enemies – it's just enough to tip the scales in *Galaga*'s favour for this space war, so raid the sofa for those 10p's.

Presentation:	88%
Graphics:	84%
Sound:	80%
Gameplay	87%
Lifespan	90%
OVERALL	**88%**

CHAOS ENGINE

The Chaos Engine itself is the invention of a Victorian scientist, which has turned on its owner and started created monsters. Your job is to negotiate the traps the Chaos Engine throws at you before destroying the out-of-control machine itself. What this storyline translates to in terms of gameplay is a top-down shooter where you have to trigger nodes around the level to activate the exit and progress. It also means the game can be presented in a unique industrial setting, with the metallic colours and theme running right through to the menus.

Chaos Engine's twist is that there are two players on screen at all times. You select your own character from six (Mercenary, Brigand, Gentleman, Scientist, Navvie and Thug) and then choose your sidekick. Your partner can either be controlled by a second player or AI, which can be a little erratic at times but still serves as useful back-up.

Unlike other top-down shooters such as *Smash TV*, *Chaos Engine* doesn't move at breakneck speed. Enemies take time to kill and your character is unable to shoot and move at the same time, which means the pace is slowed down for a more cagey, tactical affair. As a result, there's a stern challenge on offer here and it'll take real determination and skill to see the last levels, although the results are well worth it. Perhaps it's just as well Bitmap Brothers insist you have a partner to fight alongside you…

▼ The pace may be slow, but the challenge is tough – so it's a good job you've always got someone to help you out.



Presentation:	90%
Graphics:	86%
Sound:	86%
Gameplay	92%
Lifespan	90%
OVERALL	**90%**

DARRAN God bless the Bitmap Brothers, practically everything they touch turns to solid gold and *Chaos Engine* is no exception. From the moment you enter *Chaos Engine*'s steam-punk game world you're instantly thrown into one of the greatest shooters I've ever played and, what's more, every subsequent level just keeps on getting better. Adding the computer-controlled second player is a stroke of genius and the desolate-looking worlds are superb. Let's just hope this game sells well enough to get a much-deserved sequel.

MICHAEL POWELL

***Powerdrome* was a multiformat cult hit but its developer, Michael Powell, never achieved the stardom he truly deserved. However, after 15 years he's at the head of the Argonaut team working on *Powerdrome*'s next-gen remake. We find out how things have changed since the Eighties…**



interviewed by KEITH EDWARDS

Although Michael Powell is one of this issue's retro champions, he'd sit just as easily in the main body of the magazine as he has a new game out in a few weeks. *Powerdrome* is a remake of the 1989 futuristic racing classic of the same name, and, unusually, Powell has worked on the original and the remake. In fact, he single-handedly coded the first *Powerdrome* (which was also his first commercial game) and was able to build upon it to forge a career in the games industry which has seen him start his own company and now head up a studio at Argonaut.

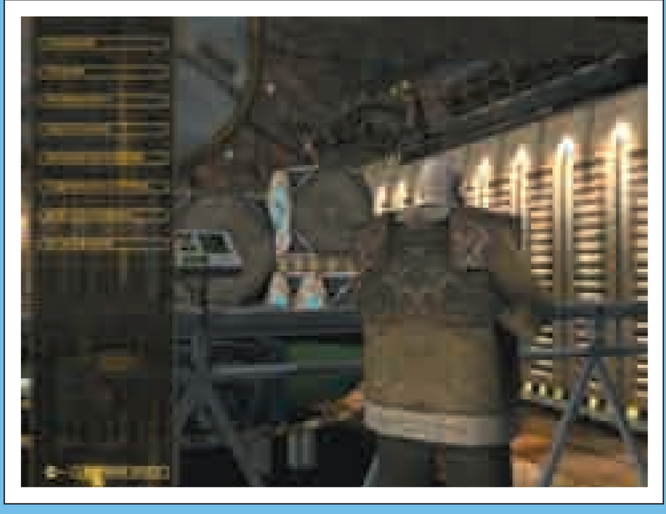
As with many industry stalwarts, Powell's love of games began at an early age. He recalls his father buying an Atari VCS 2600 for the whole family to play on, with *Combat* being the first title they enjoyed on it. Before long, Michael was playing around with the idea of making his own games. "I made what was then called a TV game from an electronics kit – it was basically *Pong*," he says. His gaming hobby continued although it wasn't until several years later that he decided to turn it into a career.

"I studied mechanical engineering at university, which covered how machines work and are designed," he says. "Then, after I left university, I had a friend [Glyn Williams, with whom Powell would later start a development studio] who already worked in one of the

POWERDROME POWER-UP

The videogames industry has changed a lot since 1989 when the Amiga and ST versions of *Powerdrome* launched. For Michael Powell, this has meant being less hands-on with the remake. "Development has changed massively," he says. "The original *Powerdrome* was done by just me doing all the art, code and sound effects. The new *Powerdrome* is being developed by a team of more than 20 talented people."

▲ The *Independence War* series (*I-War* for short) has attracted a sizeable online community.



▲ Powell's favourite title he's worked on is *I-War* (the sequel is shown here). It was the last game he helped code.

first videogame companies – seeing him make a living at it encouraged me to start. I had already programmed lots of games in my spare time, but that's when I knew that I wanted to do it full time." Despite his decision to become a full-time programmer, though, things were initially fairly understated for Powell. "I was a freelancer first of all, working out of my spare attic bedroom. My first project was, of course, the original *Powerdrome*," he says triumphantly, and rightly so – many believe that without *Powerdrome* we might never have had *WipEout*. And if such a thing is to be believed, then the success of PlayStation in Europe could have a lot to do with Powell's innovative creation…

Of course, things move on and, after completing *Powerdrome* on ST, Amiga and PC, Powell worked on numerous other projects from his attic. "I worked for a while on *Cyberfight*, which was a robot beat-'em-up project, unfortunately cancelled," he says. "I also did *SubWar 2050* for Microprose, which was a mission-based sci-fi submarine combat game." It was also during this time that the now-experienced programmer first worked with Argonaut – the company that would eventually employ him on a full-time basis. "I worked on *Vortex* for the SNES, in collaboration with Argonaut using the Super FX chip," he reveals.

However, after eight years of freelance work from his makeshift studio, Powell realised that the industry had changed considerably and that it was time to think about upgrading to something more substantial. "Glyn Williams and I started Particle Systems in 1995, as we realised that games were too big to be done by one person any more," he explains. "Particle was then acquired by Argonaut in 2002 when we realised that games were too big to be done by one studio any more!"

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Out of all the games he's worked on, though, Powell remembers one being more rewarding than the rest. "I would say that the most enjoyable of the completed projects for me was *I-War*, because it was a small team – only six people – and just two of us did all the coding and mission building, so it was a chance to have a big influence on how the game turned out," he says. "It was also the last project I did any coding on." Despite his current managerial role at Argonaut, it's clear that he misses working as part of a small, close-knit team. And who wouldn't? These days, many successful products are created by huge teams of people, and tend to rely more on clever marketing and promotions than innovation.

FAST WORK

Even so, Powell's outlook hasn't been clouded by the current trend for over-commercialism, preferring instead to let his latest creation sell on the back of its quality. "When we set out on *Powerdrome*, we sat down and discussed at considerable length just what we thought was most important in racing games, especially a futuristic sci-fi racer like *Powerdrome*," he explains. "Our key words for the project were speed, skill and drama. So it was all about portraying the sense of speed, letting the player learn and master racing skill, and never forgetting the need to convey the drama of a race from start to finish. Of course, we think we've achieved that – people who've played the game have been blown away by the experience."

RACING FORWARD

Speed, skill and drama aside, you'd think that lacklustre sales of titles such as *F-Zero* and, worse still, *Quantum Redshift* would be a worrying prospect for any developer, but Powell is sticking to his guns. "I think not doing a game because a genre, as a whole, is not doing well is as misguided as chasing genres that are doing well right now," he says. "We're not worried about the sales of *Quantum Redshift* or any other racing game – our job is to do the best job we can by delivering the most fantastic racing experience. Once we've done that it's out of our hands and the game buyers will decide."



▲ Powell worked with Argonaut on *Vortex*, using the SNES's legendary Super FX chip.

SOFTOGRAPHY

- Powerdrome (Amiga/ST/DOS) 1989
- Cyberfight (Cancelled)
- SubWar 2050 (DOS) 1993
- Vortex (SNES) 1994
- I-War (PC) 1997
- I-War Defiance (PC) 1998
- I-War 2: Edge Of Chaos (PC) 2001
- Lego Bionicle (Xbox/PC/GC/PS2) 2003
- Powerdrome (PS2/Xbox) 2004







ROM SERVICE

EVERY ISSUE, WE'LL BE LOOKING AT THE STATE OF EMULATION. THIS MONTH, WE REVEAL NINTENDO'S UNIQUE STRATEGY FOR CUTTING DOWN ON GAME BOY ADVANCE PIRACY

However you look at it, Nintendo's anti-piracy policy is far from discreet. The Japanese giant has already had a huge number of websites shut down for hosting illegal material, and even when it comes to borderline issues like importing, the firm has shown that it's not to be trifled with.

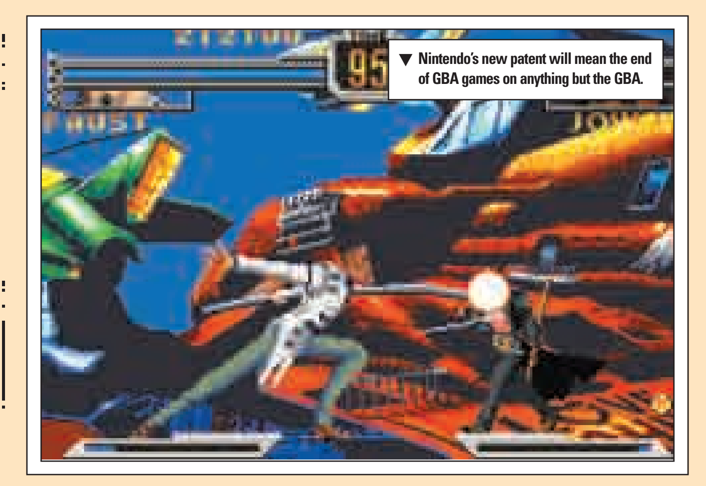
Nintendo's latest move to crack down on emulation is strangely ingenious – it has patented the idea of Game Boy Advance emulation. This means that any future GBA emulators on any platform will be infringing copyright and therefore illegal. As well as being a deterrent to PC users and coders, it will be particularly useful in preventing emulators appearing on mobile phones and PDAs, and even future consoles like the PSP.

THE POWER OF THE PATENT

The patent (number 6,672,963, fact fans) was actually filed four years ago by Patrick J. Link on behalf on Nintendo, but was only granted this January. "This invention relates to systems, methods, techniques, data structures, and other features for running software applications including but not limited to videogames on platforms different from the ones the software is intended or designed to run on," states the official US Patent Office record of Nintendo's 'invention', seemingly opening the floodgates for all manner of lawsuits against any program that it believes to be an infringement.

The first such project to be hit was Firestorm gbaZ, a GBA emulator for the fledgling Tapwave Zodiac. Canadian developer Crimson Fire was sent a 'cease and desist' warning on the day the emulator was due to be shipped. Kyle Poole, head of the project, had to spread the bad news via the Crimson Fire forum. "Unfortunately, we have no choice but to hold off on the Firestorm release until we can consult a lawyer, and if we choose not to go ahead because of the big N, then we will of course refund everyone's money," he wrote. If this matter does end up going to court, the might of Nintendo is likely to prevail. Not only will it be able to argue copyright infringement, but also a patent violation for the act of emulation.

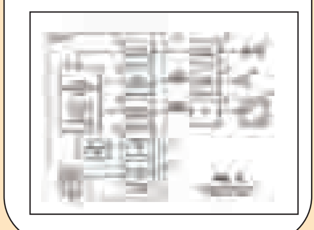
The patent is certainly a smart move by Nintendo, but could it be deemed an abuse of the US Patent system, a service put in place to protect new intellectual properties and promote originality? With the patent now in force this worry is irrelevant, but it will be interesting to see where the patent takes the grey area of emulation.



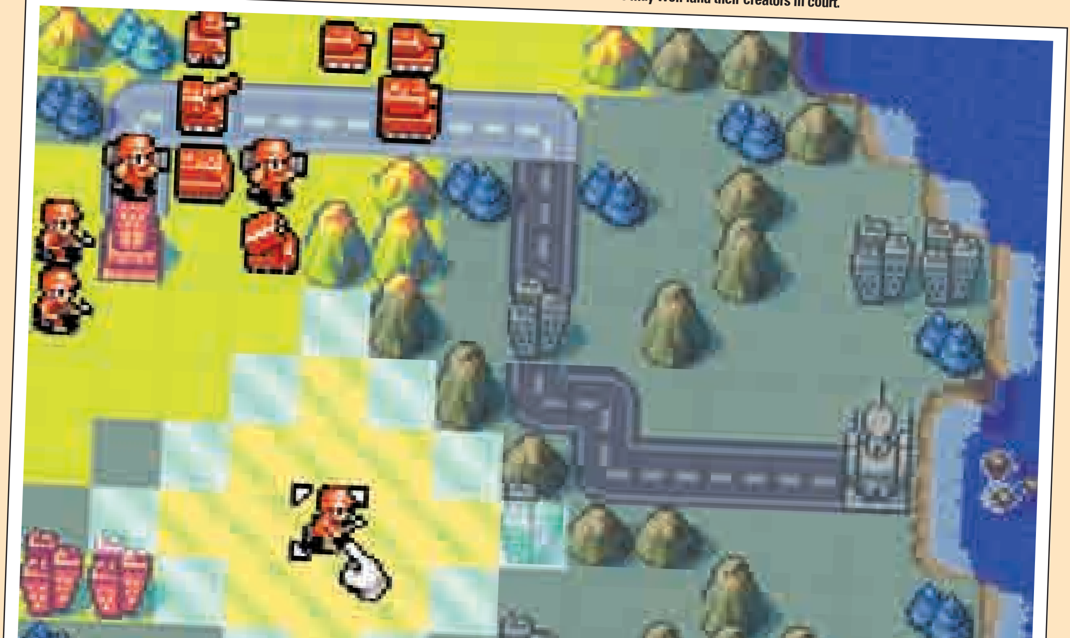
▼ Nintendo's new patent will mean the end of GBA games on anything but the GBA.

FIGHT THE POWER

Despite now having legal grounds to close emulators, it remains to be seen whether Nintendo will try to shut down existing GBA emulators, which now number almost double figures. A loophole within the patent itself refers to emulators that can tailor the way they work depending on the ROM image used, something that applies more to the likes of the N64 emulator UltraHLE and excludes current GBA emulators. But while the wording may be slightly off, it's best to see this as a blanket warning from Nintendo.



▼ The emulators created before the patent was granted should be unaffected by it, but future emulations may well land their creators in court.



48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



"NIGHTSHADE" recommended retail price £9.95 inc VAT.
Available from W.H.SMITHS, BOOTS, J.MENZIES, WOOLWORTHS
and all good software retail outlets. Also available from
ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME, The Green, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU
(P&P are included) Tel: 0530 411485

NIGHTSHADE (ZX Spectrum) Ultimate Play The Game, 1985 – UK Advertisement

Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact
If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

A QUEST THAT TIME FORGOT

Dear games™
I was just wondering if anybody else has had the chance to play any of the *Quest For Glory* games by Sierra? In my opinion they are some of the best RPG games ever created and haven't had the recognition they deserve. In *QFG4*, like many other RPGs, you choose the profession of the main character – for example a wizard, fighter or thief. Now I know you must be thinking it sounds very clichéd, but when this was around, games such as *KOTOR* weren't even a possibility.

Graphics-wise *QFG* is pretty basic and cartoony, but still manages to deliver the atmospheric results needed, especially when running through woods or castles at night. The soundtrack is pretty cool as well, with some funny one-liners. If you were to compare these games to anything else they would be like *Broken Sword* but with a fighting element like a basic *Final Fantasy* game. All you RPG fans should definitely go out and buy one of the five available – *QUEST FOR GLORY* ROCKS!
Alex Bradshaw, via email

■ We have to be honest, Alex, we've never actually played *Quest For Glory*, though it seems that everyone who has really loves it. Perhaps in the future we can feature it in the retro section as a game that time forgot.

SONY NO, NO, NO

Dear games™
What the hell is Sony thinking not letting SNK's games be released on the PlayStation2? I've been playing videogames for about 20 years now and some of my favourites were made by SNK. I've actually still got an AES home system with a few games, but because it isn't usually plugged in these days (the missus won't let me keep all my consoles set up), I was looking forward to playing some of the classics again on my PS2.

I read your review of *Metal Slug 3* a few issues back and was impressed with the extras that had been included on the disc. In fact, a few of my mates were looking forward to buying it – especially seeing as the AES cartridge still sells for over £200.

I'll be interested to see if SNK's plans to release its games on Xbox actually go ahead. If Sony isn't going to let such great games come out I'll simply have to buy the Xbox versions instead. Plus they're supposed to be making use of Xbox Live so perhaps it's better off this way after all.
Gary Cornell, via email

■ We were just as shocked as you when we heard that *Metal Slug 3* hadn't passed Sony Of America's quality control testing. Having played the Japanese version of the game, we really don't know why it wouldn't have got through. The style of the game would mean that it would only ever attract a small amount of interest, but for the hardcore gamers that love SNK's two-dimensional games it's a bit of a kick in the teeth, really. And as for SNK – it's been trying hard to get up and running again after a disastrous couple of years. Surely setbacks like this can't be helping the company's business plan.



IT'S SIMPLY BLACK AND WHITE

Dear games™
In your last issue you had a piece about *Captain Commando* by Capcom, and for some reason both the screenshots were black and white. Was this a printing error? It's such a colourful game that I can't imagine you making them black and white on purpose.
Kevin Petersham, via email

■ Actually, those screenshots were supposed to be black and white. If you take a look back through magazines from 20 years ago, there were occasional pages with images that were printed in black and white – in an effort to capture the flavour of genuine Eighties mags, we've adopted a few of these style points. Eagle-eyed readers may also have noticed that the text sometimes doesn't fill the page – this is deliberate too, as in the 'olden days' the designers would just leave a gap if there weren't enough words. We're hoping to take the retro authenticity a step further next issue by sitting on Greenham Common for a week and wearing rolled-up jacket sleeves.

BOGUS GAME ALERT

Dear games™
I was reading your 'Top Of The Plots' feature in issue 16 and was intrigued to see *Greendog* on the Mega Drive. I remember first seeing it on a promotional video that was on the front of a magazine, and even though it looked

STAR LETTER ■ STAR LETTER ■



Dear games™
Thanks for the well-timed article on the Neo-Geo Pocket in issue 16. As many readers will know, Gamestation and other stores are selling this handheld with six games for just £80 at the moment. However, anyone who looks up the web link on the packaging of these units (www.eplayplay.com) will find the supplier was selling them for just $40 (£22) before they sold out. This is not a mistake! I managed to buy mine from www.play-asia.com, the only place I could find with the units in stock, and paid around £55 including shipping from Hong Kong – that's £25 cheaper than the shop 300 yards from my house!

At the risk of upsetting a few of your advertisers, can I suggest that you highlight the currently favourable dollar exchange rate to your readers.
Jason Dalby, via email
P.S. Do you know the story about the origin of these units? It seems someone's found several hundred in a warehouse and wanted to sell them as quickly as possible.

■ Thanks for your letter, Jason. You're right – there are some good offers available on Neo-Geo Pocket consoles these days, though we'd be interested to know if your machine at £55 came complete with six games, as the ones from Gamestation do. As for the origin of the units, that depends on whether they were European or Japanese. In the UK, many retailers returned their stock within weeks of the launch due to poor sales, and all those machines had to go somewhere. From what we can tell, they were eventually picked up for next to nothing and have since been filtered back through to retail. Now see if you can find yourself a copy of *Faselei* for £55…

really frustrating, I still went out and bought it (it was by SEGA, after all).

In case any of your readers are thinking about playing *Greendog*, just don't. This was probably the most disappointing game I played on the Mega Drive. The levels were all really bland and you couldn't tell what you could land on and what you'd fall right through. Worse still, Greendog was so unresponsive that you had to plan everything early for it to work.

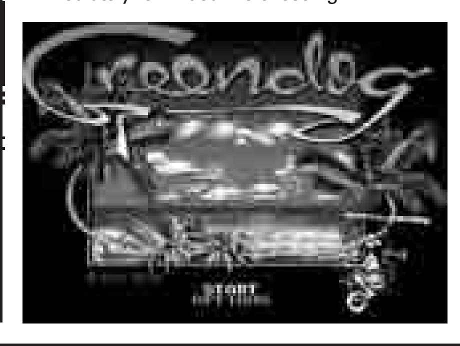
I think you should have probably listed this in your Look Back In Anger section – it really was that bad.
Martin Lawson, via email

■ We agree with you on this one, Martin – *Greendog* really was appalling. We seem to remember that promotional video too. Whoever was playing it was having few problems with a giant clam – because the controls were so sluggish, he kept getting snapped up by it because he wasn't quick enough to get out of the way. So yes, steer clear of *Greendog*.

THAT WOULD BE AN ECUMENICAL MATTER

Dear games™
In the Retro section of issue 17 there was a screenshot of a mystery *Street Fighter II* game that was featured in an episode of *Father Ted*.

That screenshot is of an early version of *Street Fighter II Special Champion Edition* for the SEGA Genesis (Mega Drive). The black bar along the top and small-size character sprites immediately reminded me of seeing screenshots of the preview in *EGM* back in the early 1990s.



I believe the game was first displayed with the black bar at Tokyo Toy Show in Japan (along with the first news of a six-button controller). Based on negative feedback from people attending the show, that version of game was scrapped and redone to look more like the SNES version.

How the footage got into an episode of *Father Ted* is beyond me. It's possible they got their hands on a prototype cart from a former Capcom employee who happened to be working on the set, or attended the Toy Show.

Keep up the excellent work – your magazine is so good I import it to the United States, especially since the gaming mags here suck!
Brenton Borge, New York

■ Wow, thanks for the explanation – you certainly know your stuff. But we have no idea how that sort of code would find itself onto *Father Ted*. And then there were the joysticks…

CLASSIC CONSOLE

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** BBC MICRO
- **PRICE:** £50
- **THREE OF THE BEST:**
  Castle Quest (est. price £2)
  L: A Mathmagical Adventure (est. £5)
  Frak! (est price £5)
- While the C64 and ZX Spectrum remain the favourites with retro gamers, the BBC Micro has its fair share of fans too. Pick one up for less than £50.

HOW TO USE GAMES TRADING MARKET

SELLING

Simply send the following to: gtm@paragon.co.uk
■ Your name ■ Your age (you must be over 18)
■ Your home address and telephone number (this will not be given out) ■ Your email address ■ The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month) ■ The condition of the item(s) ■ How much you want for the item(s)
Each item will be listed along with your region.

BUYING

Mail the following details to: gtm@paragon.co.uk
■ Your name ■ Your age (you must be over 18)
■ Your home address and telephone number (this will not be given out) ■ Your email address ■ The reference number for the item you want. Your email address will be passed to the seller, who will contact you to close the deal and arrange payment and delivery. This runs on a first come, first served basis.

WANTED

Contact us in the same way as above stating what items you want and any preferences on condition or price.

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This service is for private sellers, not dealers. Retro items only (nothing post-Dreamcast). No Mega Drive *FIFA* games – everyone has at least two. Highbury Entertainment Ltd cannot take responsibility for items lost or broken in the post.

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GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

Lot 50 – Boxed SEGA Saturn with 12 games, all boxed with instructions. All leads, two pads and one demo disc included, though the console box is missing its internal packaging. £60. Lancashire.

Lot 64 – Battle Squadron (UK version) for Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions. £2 plus p+p. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 65 – Circus (UK version) for Atari 2600. Boxed with instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 66 – F/A-18 Interceptor (UK version) for Amiga. Boxed with instructions. £2. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 69 – Harvest Moon for Game Boy Color. Like new. £16. Bucks.

Lot 70 – R-Type DX for Game Boy Color. Like new. £16. Bucks.

Lot 71 – Fantasia for SEGA Mega Drive. Very good condition. £10. Bucks.

Lot 72 – Aladdin for SEGA Mega Drive. Very good condition. £10. Bucks.

Lot 73 – Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker for SEGA Mega Drive. Very good condition. £10. Bucks.

Lot 74 – Street Fighter II arcade JAMMA board. Good working order. £50. Wilts.

Lot 75 – Yu Suzuki Gameworks book with Dreamcast disc of six classic arcade titles, including *OutRun*, *Afterburner* etc. Mint condition. £50. Wilts.

Lot 76 – Leisure Suit Larry Compilation Disc for PC CD-ROM. Includes parts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. Good condition with box and instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 77 – Golden Axe 3 (Japanese version) for SEGA Mega Drive. Good condition with box and instructions. £27 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 78 – McDonald's TreasureLand Adventure (Japanese version) for SEGA Mega Drive. Good condition with box and instructions. £25 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 79 – Panzer Dragoon (Japanese version) for SEGA Saturn. Good condition with box and instructions. £5 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 80 – Soukyugurentai (Black Cover, Japanese version) for SEGA Saturn. Good condition with box and instructions. £35 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 81 **– Unboxed Pikachu Nintendo 64** with five games – *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, *Turok Dinosaur Hunter*, *Pokémon Snap*, *Pokémon Stadium 2* and *Mario Tennis*. All in excellent condition apart from *Turok* box. All instruction manuals included. Good working order. £40. Glasgow.

Lot 82 **– TV Tuner** for SEGA Game Gear. Unboxed, but in good condition. £25 plus p+p. Glasgow.

WANTED

WANTED 34 – ***Disc World*** for PlayStation. Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.

WANTED 35 – *The King Of Fighters 2001* or *2002* for Neo Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Good price paid. Derbyshire.

WANTED 36 – Commodore 64 and any games published by either Hewson or 21st Century Entertainment. Manchester.

WANTED 37 – *Super Bomberman* for Super Nintendo.

WANTED 38 – *Mean Machines* magazines. Any issues, but not 3, 14, 15 or 19. Must be in good condition. Price negotiable. London.

WANTED 39 – *Waku Waku 7* or ***Galaxy Fight*** for Neo-Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Good price paid. Derbyshire.

WANTED 40 – Mega Drive II in good condition. Essex.

WANTED 41 – SEGA 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £40. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 42 – *Knuckles Chaotix* for SEGA 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £15. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 43 – SEGA 32X games. Any considered. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 44 – *Sonic CD* for SEGA Mega CD. Will pay up to£30

WANTED 45 – *Street Fighter Alpha* for Super Nintendo. Must be in perfect order and preferably with box and instruction manual. Cork.

GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

Send to: **GTM, games™, Highbury Entertainment Ltd, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS or email gtm@paragon.co.uk**

Name...

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Tick classified heading

❑ **FOR SALE** ❑ **WANTED**

Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed.

Crossword Challenge

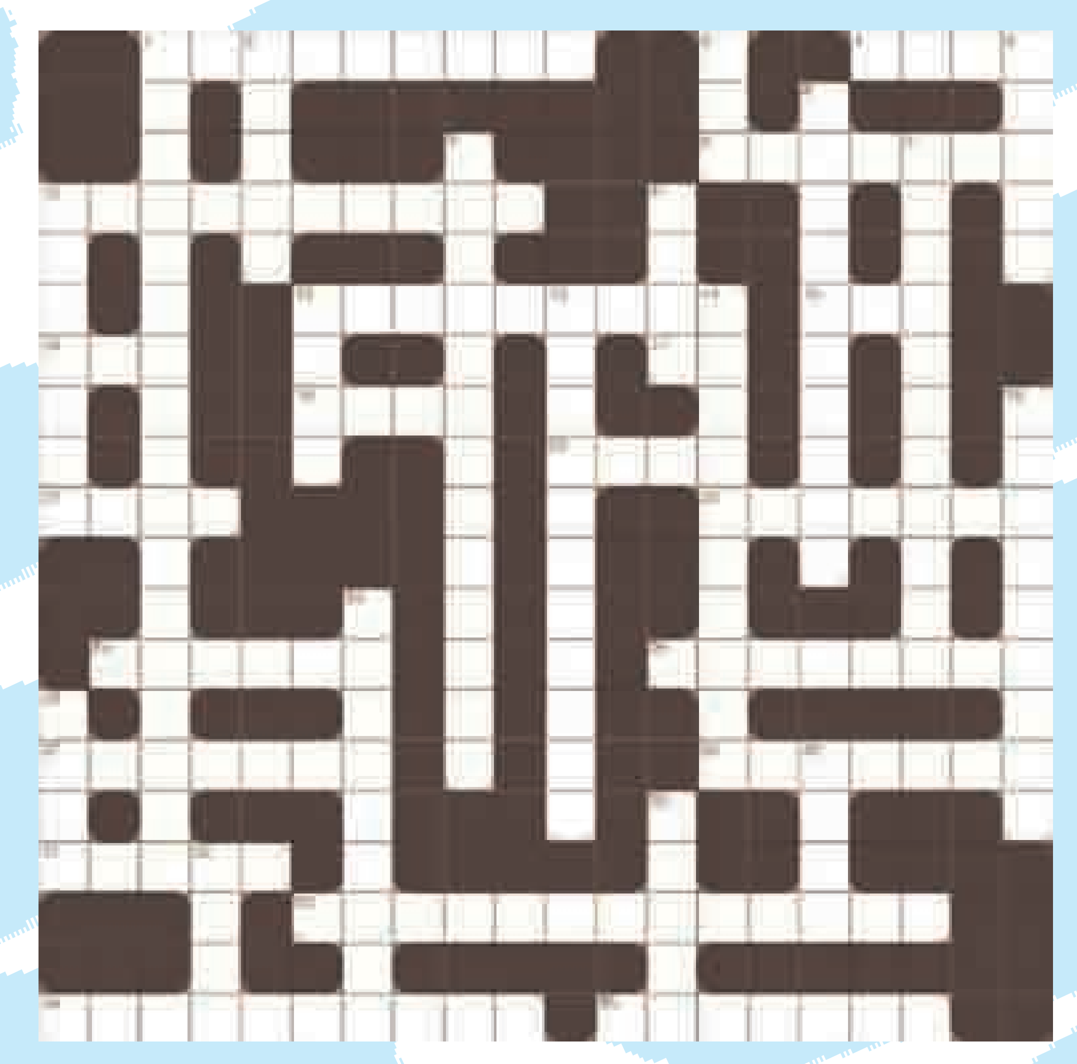
Test your gaming knowledge with our retro-themed crossword

ACROSS

1. British *WipEout* developer (9)
4. This puzzle is solved by starting at the end of the alphabet (4)
8. Why did this guy cross the road? (7)
10. Takara's Japanese battle arena (3,4,3)
12. Game hero licensed to kill (5,4)
15. Mel Gibson's chicken went for one of these on the Dreamcast (3)
16. Atari's (---) *Fighter* was at the tip of visual engineering in 1990 (3)
17. Are you ready? Get, set, (--) (2)
18. SNK's *Magician* (----) helped to shift Neo-Geo AESs (4)
20. This hero has been the key character in a chain of games (4)
21. (----) Cobras look the same as each other (4)
22. Jaleco 1983 shooter (7)
24. Atari's console was never going to be the top cat (6)
25. F-1 was as popular as SEGA in 1980 (6,2)
27. Shion played it before Link (7)
28. 1994 shooter from Psikyo (7)
31. This brother was green with envy (5)
33. This game was full of crazy balls, so to speak (6,7)
34. Hardcore gamers relished this 1982 classic (10)
35. MB hardware that didn't use pixels (7)

DOWN

1. This dinosaur-infested odyssey shot to fame in 1972 (11,6)
2. Mario's tongue-tastic sidekick (5)
3. Kick (---) at the start of a match (3)
5. It's Mario's (-----) and he'll cry if he wants to (5)
6. Hudson's PC Engine game that just went cubic (4,6)
7. Nintendo didn't need to try and force us to love this series (6,2,5)
9. Polyphony's best-known game (4,7)
10. Jeff Minter's storming shooter (7)
11. Tennis for retro gamers (4)
12. Japanese DC launch title (4)
13. In this game, Rockford had better be quick to avoid those falling rocks (7,4)
14. Nintendo was only monkeying around, but Faye Wray had still better watch herself (6,4)
19. Midway's classic shooter that had a hundred legs (9)
23. SEGA's dream console that turned into a nightmare (9)
26. He's from the Nth Dimension (4)
29. *Deep Space* (----) – The Collective's PC game (4)
30. id's FPS that shook the earth (5)
32. (----) *Wars* – SNK beat-'em-up (4)

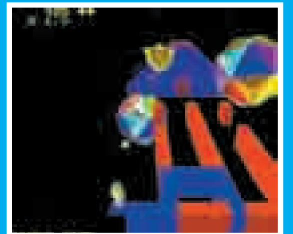


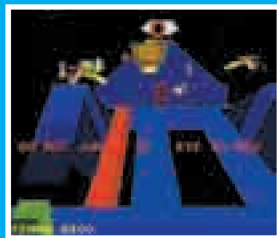
NEXT MONTH IN RETRO!

- We delve inside the Atari ST to discover a classic gaming platform
- Was *I-Robot* the greatest game ever? We think it might have been
- Is it a remake? Is it a re-release? No, it's a, er, well, they're new retro games, sort of…

PLUS!

- More games that time forgot
- More great retro gaming moments
- More retro reviews





LAST MONTH'S CROSSWORD SOLUTION

Across 2. Space Invaders, 9. Conker, 10. Gun, 11. ToeJam, 13. Amiga, 14. Yu, 15. Irem, 17. Doom, 18. Out Run, 19. Red, 20. Adon, 21. Alex, 23. Mech, 24. Labyrinth, 26. Egg, 27. Hook, 28. Road, 29. Ayami Kojima, 34. Samus, 36. Nintendo, 37. Tahoe, 38. Aoi, 39. Streets Of Rage, 41. Pit Fall, 42. Chu Chu Rocket

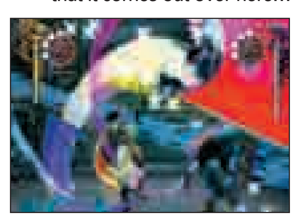
Down 1. Kung Fu, 2. Shin Nihon Kikaku, 3. Arcade, 4. Ein, 5. Virtua, 6. Defender, 7. Samba De Amigo, 8. Sonic The Hedgehog, 12. MAME, 14. Yamauchi, 16. Mana, 22. Rayman, 25. Ryo, 30. Ken, 31. Joe, 32. Midas, 33. StarFox, 35. Atari, 40. Race


eMag

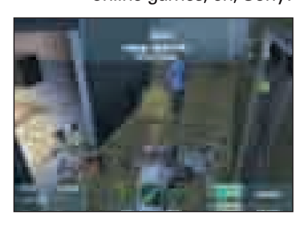
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT
BUJINGAI
Okay, so maybe games based around pop stars haven't done so well in the past, but then those games haven't been as frantic as *Bujingai* – sword-swinging fantasy action has never felt so right. Now we just have to hope that it comes out over here…



VIEWPOINT
SOCOM II: NAVY SEALS
And so the PS2's online assault continues – albeit in the somewhat limited form of a single game. Apart from *Hardware*, this is the only title attracting many visitors as far as we can tell. Where are the killer online games, eh, Sony?



VIEWPOINT
CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH
It looks like *Baldur's Gate*, it plays like *Baldur's Gate*… but it's not. Instead, this rather fun *EverQuest* offshoot has managed to provide us with plenty of enjoyment over the last month – especially when played as an Orc-slaying team.



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

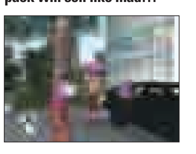
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for ages
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Ico
By now you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



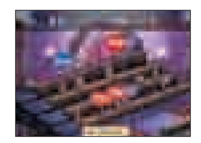
GTA: Vice City
Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling. No doubt the twin pack will sell like mad…



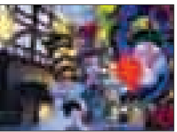
Pro Evolution Soccer 3
Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games.

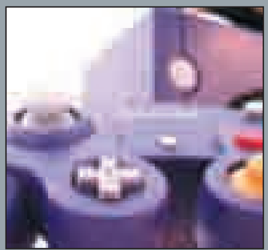


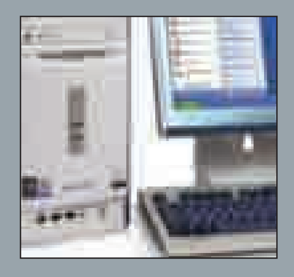
Disgaea
You know how we said that *Dark Chronicle* was big? Well, this is bigger. And now it's out over here… yay.



Dark Chronicle
Of course, PAL gamers can still take solace in the fact that Sony's epic RPG is pretty damn huge too.



XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	In-House	Fairly decent action-strategy that comes alive online
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Project Gotham Racing 2

We admit it – we're addicted to online racing. If only because it means we've got loads more friends.



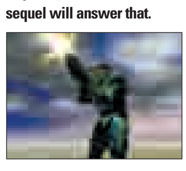
GTA: Double Pack

Rockstar's belated release of the PS2's best-selling titles has 'value for money' written all over it.



Halo

Great AI, but is it really the best Xbox game ever? Hopefully, the arrival of the sequel will answer that.



Jet Set Radio Future

It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti.



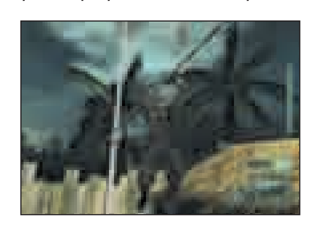
Star Wars: KOTOR

Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



VIEWPOINT
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Oh, come on – did you really expect this much-anticipated sequel to not deliver the goods? Subtle tweaks to the single-player aside, this is all about the Live mode; you don't know fear until you've played us at it. Really.



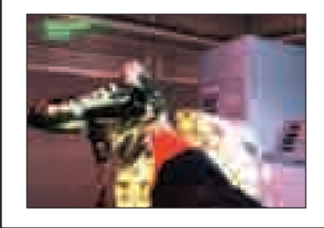
VIEWPOINT
GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

It might not have been the gut-busting humour fest that we'd hoped for from Rare, but returning to it this month has seen us still manage to get some laughs out of the company's first Xbox title.



VIEWPOINT
BREAKDOWN

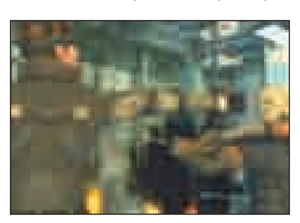
We've spent much time with the import version of Namco's hybrid FPS fighting adventure… but that doesn't necessarily make it a good game. Innovation notwithstanding, it's a rather bland experience. We'll give you the full lowdown next issue.



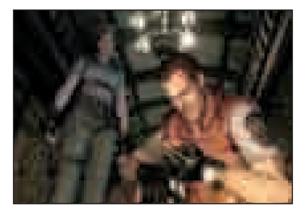
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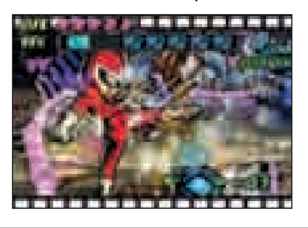
VIEWPOINT
METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES
Don't believe the hype – it's not the best game for the GameCube ever. That said, though, it's definitely a solid update of an oldie-but-goodie title, and if you can get over how much it's aged you'll really enoy it.



VIEWPOINT
RESIDENT EVIL
Would you believe it, but a recent run-in with Vivendi's upcoming *X-Files* game sent us running back to Capcom's treasured GameCube remake for comfort. Not that they're comparable in a quality sense, of course. If you haven't got it, you're missing out.



VIEWPOINT
VIEWTIFUL JOE
Just missing out on a nomination for graphical excellence in our awards, the news that Capcom's superhero title is coming to the PS2 means GameCube owners have only got a little time left to boast about Joe's excellence before it becomes open season.



GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

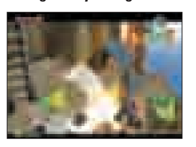
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	In-House	A markedly different game to the competition
Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Square-Enix	Different from the norm, with a distinct multiplayer flavour
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	Silicon Knights	Hardly innovative, but still a great game in its own right
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to *Pro Evolution*
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Metroid Prime
The only game so far to score a perfect ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



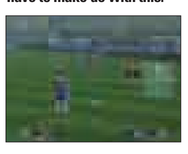
Zelda: The Wind Waker
Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



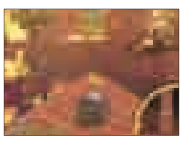
F-Zero GX
Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.

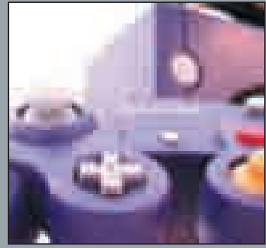


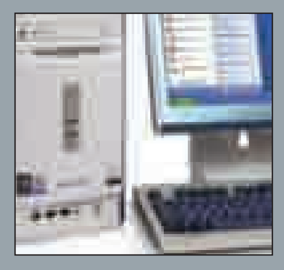
Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution
***Pro Evo*'s never coming out on the Cube, so you'll have to make do with this.**



Super Monkey Ball 2
Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.



GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



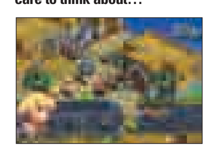
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is also available now in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami IMPORT	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft	Binary 9
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Yu-Gi-Oh!: World Championship 2004	Konami	In-House
Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Final Fantasy Tactics
So in-depth and absorbing that you'll end up losing more hours of your life than you'd care to think about…



Mario & Luigi
A genuinely fresh and playable *Mario* game that's not a remake of an old SNES title. Absolutely brilliant.



Zelda: Link To The Past
The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with *Four Swords* and you've got an unmissable title.



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



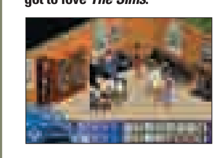
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
FarCry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
The Sims	EA	Maxis
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

The Sims
Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love *The Sims*.

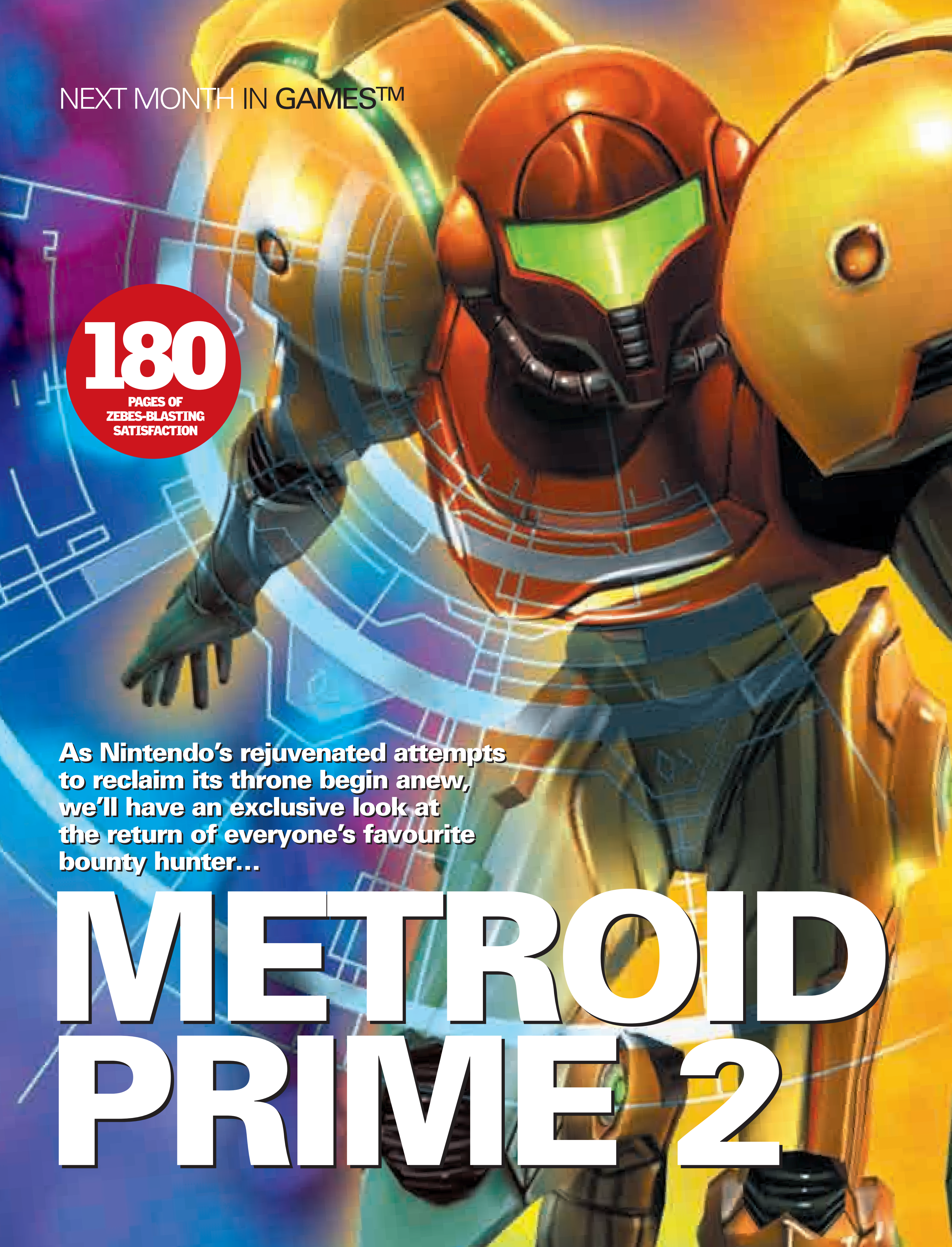


Deus Ex
Freeform gaming as it was meant to be. If only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive.



GTA: Vice City
Looks better than its PS2 cousin and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.





NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
180
PAGES OF
ZEBES-BLASTING
SATISFACTION
As Nintendo's rejuvenated attempts to reclaim its throne begin anew, we'll have an exclusive look at the return of everyone's favourite bounty hunter...
METROID PRIME 2



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

What will you be playing next Christmas? We'll answer that question thanks to a low-key event that we like to refer to as E3…

MORE… REVIEWS

You want games to get you through those spring months? You've got them – *Hitman Contracts, Painkiller, Breakdown, Red Dead Revolver* and more besides.

MORE… FEATURES

We head to snowy Sweden to meet the people behind SEGA's *Headhunter* (and ask what the hell they've been doing for so long), finally have the chance to talk to Peter Molyneux, and take a long hard look at what the future might hold for Nintendo…

ON SALE 20 MAY 04

Please note: Due to late code and unforeseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it, like words and pictures and what have you.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THE BIT OF THE MAG THAT WE LEND YOU TO ENTERTAIN AND INFORM, OR AT LEAST WORRY ABOUT WHETHER NINTENDO AND SONY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING…



Jumping in FPSs, violence in games and, after going on retreat, our dear old friend Nintendo returns to the forefront of your minds. Bless you all.

MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Highbury Entertainment
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**Endangered**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

IT SEEMS TO me that we humans spend a great deal of time playing games which require you to shoot, stab or generally hurt another person in order to complete the game. What happened to games like *Spyro*? For once, I would like to see more games that are innocent.

I am not saying that FPSs, RPGs or action games are not fun or do not have a place in our society; they are fun and they do have a place. But, let's face it, we expose our children to enough violence in everyday life. It's good to spend quality time playing a game with your child and it seems like E-rated games are hard to find. Thank heavens for *Mario*, *Spyro* and *Scooby Doo*! Let's make some more games truly rated 'E' for *everyone*.

Remember: the future of gaming is not the geriatric crowd, it's the newbies – and their needs are different than ours.
Kelly D

games™: Yes, there are a lot of guns and violence in games. But there are also plenty of puzzle, sports and RPG titles that contain no violence whatsoever, so we can't really agree with your argument. As we often find ourselves saying, publishers release games that the public demands, and, whatever your view of violent games, it seems that they're popular. That means that it's the parents, not publishers, who should take responsibility for the games that their children are exposed to. And there are plenty of kiddy-friendly titles out there, it's just that we don't tend to review them as your average *Deus Ex* or *Pro Evo* fan probably isn't too interested in *Scooby Doo 2*.

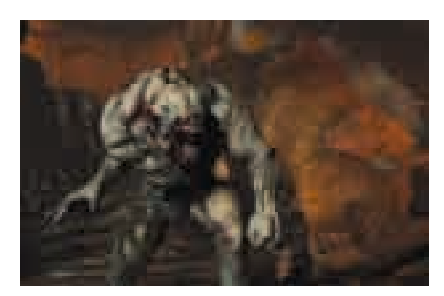
AFTER SEEING THE video of *Death Jr.* on the internet for the PSP, I was impressed – which is a first for Sony hardware. But if it's true that the PSP's power is almost that of the PS2, could Nintendo be in trouble? The huge PlayStation brand coming to the handheld market with growing support could be a big danger to Nintendo.

After hearing about the DS, I'm quite sceptical about what it is and how powerful it is – I've heard it's probably going to be as powerful as the Nintendo64, and I've also been hearing rumours about the possibility of the GBA2 also being released. If this is true, why is Nintendo going to be releasing two handhelds?

It seems like a big mistake and one which is reminiscent of the early Nineties when SEGA released the Mega CD, 32X and the Saturn, which confused the consumer and led to people losing faith in SEGA – the 32X and Mega CD were failures, while the Saturn only had real success in Japan, probably thanks to

"IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE HUMANS SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME PLAYING GAMES WHICH REQUIRE YOU TO SHOOT, STAB OR GENERALLY HURT ANOTHER PERSON"

Can graphics get much better than *Doom III*? Some people think not…



the Segata Sanshirou ad campaign. Of course, this came back to haunt the Dreamcast, as many ignored it and waited for the PS2. So could Nintendo be doing a SEGA? Getting a bit too big for its boots and releasing a stopgap handheld such as the DS (which could have the same fate as the 32X) until the GBA2 or whatever it is arrives?
Mark, Warrington

games™: Stop with your worrying. We know very little of either the PSP or the Nintendo DS, so to be concerned for Nintendo and the future of its handhelds (and the whole company) seems a little premature. Nintendo has been in the console business long enough to know what it's doing, and come E3 (when we'll most likely see the PSP and DS) we may well be every bit as excited about the DS as some are over the PSP.

AS EACH GENERATION of gaming machines arrives the graphical advances they've made amazes us. I'm sure I wasn't the only innocent child who said: "Wow, look at the amazing visuals on game 'X', how can they possibly improve on this?"

Obviously, you eventually learn that graphics are constantly improved thanks to those clever development people. However, Nintendo has recently said that graphics are reaching a plateau and that it would have to find other ways to enhance the gaming experience. At first, I brushed this off assuming this was a reason for the (now defunct) rumours that Nintendo would continue making games for the GameCube rather than release its new machine within the same time frame as the other big players. However, I'm actually seeing Nintendo's point here.

Take, for example, the facial likenesses in football games. Sure they can be tightened up a little but they're damn good as they stand. In-game engines are verging on photo-realism, just look at *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2*! I can't see anything like a 2D-to-3D leap coming up on the horizon, so I'm tempted to agree with Nintendo. Do you think this is actually the case or am I turning into that small child again?
Bob Bailey

games™: Graphics will continue to improve – that much is a given. People want photorealism and, on a more basic level, we like owning more and more powerful PCs and consoles to show off to our friends (sad, but true). This drives hardware developers and it continues to keep graphics-card manufacturers in business. However, the point you make about Nintendo is an interesting one, especially as of all the games developers, Nintendo remains one of the most innovative. On the face of it, it sounds like a noble pledge from Nintendo. However, it's more likely a response to the fact that its current hardware simply isn't the most graphically capable machine on the market. We have yet to see the GameCube successfully innovate videogames in the way that the company suggested, but we live in hope – perhaps Nintendo will truly amaze us all (after all, if any company can, it's Nintendo).

I LOVE VIDEOGAMES – evidently, so do you – but I love music more, unquestionably more. Why should this be? My exposure to



CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Your issue 17 letter of the month was a poor choice. My wife plays Pro Evolution Soccer 3, she at least has good taste in games.
games™: Good for her.

☐ Keep the smooth covers i hate the glossy ones
games™: Okay, we won't do shiny covers any more.

☐ I like stories
games™: And we're sure that mummy reads you one every night before you go to bed.

☐ Good grief! Fire Emblem is so addictive it ought to be banned. Is it soft to cry when you lose a level 10 knight in an ambush in fog?
games™: Of course it is, you great nonce.

☐ It takes me a good 5 or 6 trips to the toilet until i've finished reading your mag. is that normal?
games™: That depends on what you're doing in there.

☐ EA produce utter crap, and make me feel sick.
games™: Go have a lie down and think that one through a little.

☐ I've just got wor lass to buy me an AMD64FX with top specs… My PS2 is gather dust! No Max Payne 2 in the Essentials? And the Sims is kiddy crap!
games™: Hawey!

☐ When is the 'Super Mario Brothers' movie staring Hoskins and Hopper due on D.V.D? Am I the only one looking forward to it?!
games™: Hopefully never, so we think that answers your second question too.

☐ Will the rugby league game ever make it on the GC
games™: We'd love to say yes but developers appear to be dumping the GameCube at an alarming rate.

☐ Help!I've just spilled orange juice on my limited edition silver cube controller. now its all sticky and the b button won't pop back out.please help me.
games™: There's a valuable lesson here, people – don't drink and play.

☐ I just finished sonic the hedgehog for the first time ever!! Look out sonic 2 here i come!!
games™: That's okay, you just take your time, there's no rush…

"COULD NINTENDO BE DOING A SEGA? GETTING A BIT TOO BIG FOR ITS BOOTS AND RELEASING A STOPGAP HANDHELD SUCH AS THE DS?"

both started at roughly the same time and I devote equal amounts of time to each. In comparison to music, games don't mean that much to me; they're fun and fun means a lot to me, but fun can come from anywhere so I don't just associate fun with videogames.

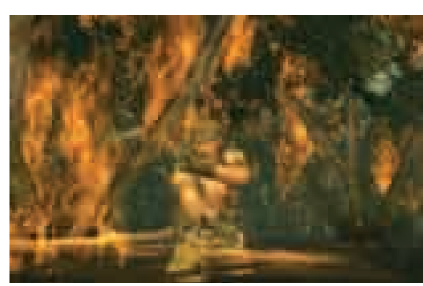
Music, however, has hidden importance that you can work out for yourself and even its own unique feelings: when *Don't Look Back Into The Sun* by The Libertines is played cold shivers run up my spine – how many games have ever done that (excluding the survival horror genre for obvious reasons)?

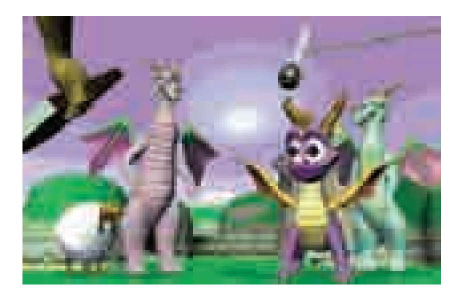
Another ability possessed by music is one to associate; some songs have now become coupled with situations, films, books and even videogames – this is often for no obvious reason, the song just pops into your head when experiencing these situations again.

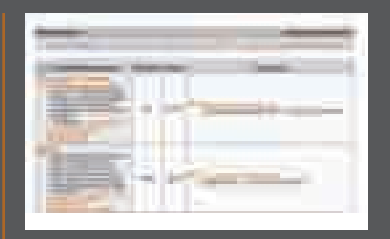
Even the greatest of games cannot do this. *Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* and *Rainbow Islands* are connected to nothing, *Metroid Prime* sends no shivers up the spine. Are videogames really this lacking, or am I just waiting for something better?
R. Goodway

games™: Music filters into the brain on a more subconscious level; you can play games whilst listening to music, you can drive, argue, cook and even fall asleep to music, whereas games require much more active involvement. Also, music is often created to express a mood or emotion, whereas games are much less evocative – when was the last time you played a game to get over a break-up, for instance? We disagree that games can't provoke a strong emotion – look at the appeal of retro gaming. Some of the games themselves may not have withstood the passage of time, but the memories they evoke can be very strong. But trying to compare the effects of games and music is ultimately futile – music will always win. Round these parts, Alice Deejay is a better tonic than *Super Monkey Ball* will ever be…

☐ **MY NAME IS** Nick Rolfe and I represent the Federated League Against Platforming in Shooters. Yes, we at F.L.A.P.S. have fought long and hard against the long-standing belief that in order to make a good first-person shooter, one must also include platforming elements, also known to our members as 'Bits where you jump into the middle of nowhere and have no







FROM THE FORUM

GAMES THAT MAKE YOUR BRAIN HURT…

feltmonkey
I'm playing through the excellent *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and I'm delighted to find that it is a genuinely intelligent game. It includes themes of capitalism, religion, identity, the media and others – all handled in a mature fashion. For the first time in a long while, I'm playing a game that actually makes me think – and I don't mean about whether to use a G3A3 or an M16 but about real world issues! I was wondering if anyone can think of any other games that have this intelligence and make you think. The only other one I can think of is the original *Deus Ex*.

Master hunter
You've all heard of *1984*'s concept of Big Brother, haven't you? Well go play *Beyond Good & Evil* and tell me how it's any different.

Jetman
I've just started *Morrowind GOTY Edition* and so far there's plenty to think about, although maybe not the sort of 'thinking' you mean. Different classes, schools, guilds… It's making my brain hurt.

Mr_Party_Hat
Black & White tried to make me think about the conflicts of good and evil… but failed miserably. That was one pretentious game.

feltmonkey
The *Tom Clancy* games try to include politics, but are too bone-headed to be considered intelligent. They tend to give an impression of politics and intrigue, rather than actually reference the real world. Their stories are generally the standard James Bond evil-types-trying-to-take-over-the-world-or-at-least-blow-a-bit-of-it-up hokum. *KOTOR* showed signs of brains. *GTA* makes you think about real-world issues, if only because of the stir surrounding the games. Several survival horror-type titles make points about the evils of corporations. Maybe something like the *Total War* games would lead you to find out more about a period of history. But I've been through my entire games collection and can't find anything else that deals with real-world issues! Why? Surely the games industry has matured to the point where designers can make a game that actually has something to say! Hasn't it?

Mista_G
The only game that really made me think is Chess on my computer.

feltmonkey
That's not what I was talking about. Lots of games make you exercise the old grey matter, but few make thought-provoking points. Unless you were having deep philosophical thoughts about the futility of war, and the way our rulers (king, queen) expect us (pawns) to sacrifice ourselves to protect their supposedly more important asses. Or maybe you were thinking along the lines of the Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney track *Ebony And Ivory*. Why can't the black and white pieces live together in perfect harmony?

Mista_G
Well, I've never played a game that's challenged my views on society. Let's face it, in that respect, most games are puerile nonsense when compared to their film/literature equivalent.

feltmonkey
Exactly. But why? There are hundreds of games released every year, yet we can only think of only a handful that have anything to say. Is it because developers feel that we aren't ready for such a game?

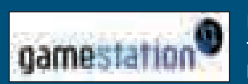
LETTER OF THE MONTH

I AM THE only person who's concerned by the apparent lack of an analogue stick on the PSP? I know the machine's specs are still not confirmed, but not having even one analogue stick would be a major oversight. The PSP will be the first handheld with top-quality 3D graphics, but what good will it be if the games produced for it will be severely hampered by a lack of analogue control?

You may think I'm overreacting, but think of how the majority of the PS2's top games rely on the analog stick for precise control. Driving games like *GT* and *Burnout 2* are no fun to play with the D-pad; *Splinter Cell* and *MGS2* rely on analogue control for their stealth aspects; and you need at least one analog stick for any FPS. And how poor would *Vice City* be if you could only use the D-pad for control?

Look at the PSP's competitors – the N-Gage in particular – and you can see how the lack of an analogue stick really hampers any 3D game on the system. One of the N-Gage's main selling points was that it could generate proper 3D graphics, but titles like *Moto GP* and *Monkey Ball* are nearly unplayable due to being only able to use a D-pad. In the age of 3D gaming, analogue control has become a must, so to not include it would be a major step backwards, and could ultimately be a factor in the machine not being the success it should be.
Gareth Lewis

games™: Whoa, calm yourself. The device has yet to be officially unveiled – it might well have 20 analogue sticks for all we know. We're pretty certain that Sony will deliver a magnificent handheld device that is perfectly tailored to our gaming needs so there's absolutely no need for concern. Buy some new games to soothe your mind.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting.

reference by which to judge where you are going to land'. We began our fight against this hideous enemy as long ago as 1993, with a little-known piece of software called *Doom*.

Since then, we have grown in size until our members include every person that has ever had to endure the section of an FPS game where they, for no good reason, have to jump over something and land precisely on something. Having no perceivable feet, they find this a little difficult to judge.

We believed our work was done in 2003 with the release of *Metroid Prime*. Finally, a game where someone recognised that judgement of where to land was actually important, if not fundamental, in completing a section of platform jumping. Then came *TRON 2.0*, featuring one level that included such staggering leaps of faith on behalf of all our members that we believe the cause of F.L.A.P.S. may have been set back at least 40 years, were it not for the fact that computer games didn't even exist then.

We look to you, **games™**, to correct this imbalance, being as you are the foremost multiplatform magazine around. And yes, we are thinking of changing our name, as we believe certain (younger-minded) members may be put off by such a suggestive acronym. Our new name is likely to be the Committee for United Negativity for… and that's as far as we've got. Any suggestions would be gratefully received.
Nick Rolfe

games™: Hahahaa, you said 'flaps'.

